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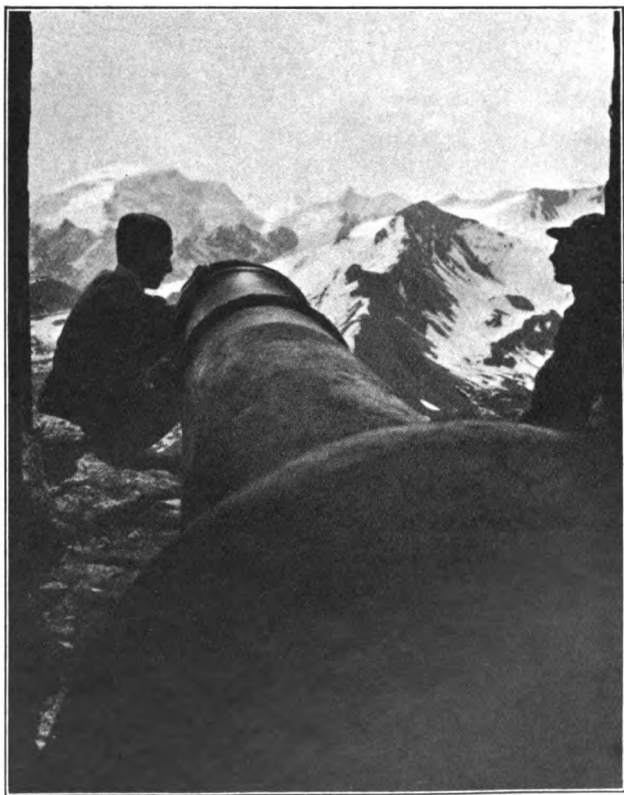
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**DIARY OF A LIAISON OFFICER
IN ITALY 1918**

[*Frontispiece.*



WAR IN THE MOUNTAINS.

Hoffnung - Goldsmid

DIARY OF A LIAISON OFFICER IN ITALY 1918

BY

CYRIL H-GOLDSMID, O.B.E.

IX LANCERS (S.R.)

LONDON

WILLIAMS AND NORRIDGE

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

TO

LIEUT.-COLONEL H. M. DURAND, D.S.O.

IX (Q.R.) LANCERS

LONDON, *Dec.* 1919

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INTRODUCTION

BEFORE recording a few incidents from my diary of the year which I spent on the Italian front, I will set down the circumstances in which I found myself immediately preceding my arrival in that theatre of war. As I commenced my journey I felt sure that, whatever my ultimate fate, my experiences would be interesting, and, although I had never kept a diary in France, I resolved to do so in Italy. My resolution, I think, was justified. I found myself placed in Italy in a position of peculiar interest, where I had opportunities of seeing and knowing more than many British and Italian officers of a very high standing. I regretted but one thing: that my capabilities and experience did not allow me to take

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greater advantage of these opportunities. It is for my readers, therefore, to be indulgent.

It was the beginning of a "show." An air of mystery pervaded the conversation of staff officers. All movements were being carried on by night, and the Hun was to receive the greatest shock he had yet experienced. Should secrecy be preserved and success be attained, the consequences would be far-reaching. Success was necessary, naturally, as is the case in every offensive operation. But, from the point of view of the general inter-allied situation, it was more essential at this moment to strike a decisive blow than perhaps at any moment during the War. The most casual observer and the most insular of Englishmen saw, in the disaster which was overtaking Italy in the autumn of 1917, a terrible threat to our sea-power in the Mediterranean and the road to the East. Success at Cambrai might have been regarded as about to serve two purposes: it would help matters in France

and relieve the position in Italy. From a wider point of view also it was the strategic counter-attack, the beginning of concerted action on all allied fronts—necessity bringing about the practical realisation of the “front unique.”

I was performing the duties of a regimental officer in one of the brigades destined to take part in this super-secret offensive: a diminutive part of the vast military machine which was being assembled, practically unknown to those who formed part of it, and which was to be set in motion on an unknown day to perform a yet unknown task.

On the morning of the 16th November 1917 I was seated at the door of a Nissen hut in the vicinity of Peronne, surveying the details of my surroundings. Comfortably ensconced in a deck-chair, after-breakfast pipe in mouth, I felt at peace with the world. Something was in the wind, but not immediately. There was the almost certain prospect of remaining in the regiment's present billet for at least a few days.

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The possibility of this short respite, and the fact that for once the sun was shining with some vestige of summer heat, were enough to make me feel at ease and restful. These small periods of rest after long marches were immeasurably welcome.

The scene before me was one which has been met and described so often that it has become more than commonplace. A row of Nissen huts and ramshackle erections, built amongst, and sometimes in, the ruins of a battered French village. The street at Doingt is as a type familiar to most sojourners in France during this period. Not one single house standing in its entirety : most of them a mass of brick-dust. Not one tree left upright : not one plant left growing in the ground.

The morning was a pleasant one, especially for the period of the year. In spite of the German's systematic policy of devastation, he had failed to destroy entirely the beauties of nature. The surrounding fields, it is true, were one huge sea of mud : trampled

by many hoofs and long columns of horses trudging to and fro from the water-troughs, they could hardly boast of one blade of grass. Further afield, however, the view was more pleasing. The bold, undulating stretches of grass and uncultivated land reached as far as one could see. On the tops of the hills, in the small woods that the retreating Hun had had no time to maim, the leaves shone in the sunlight, the action of the breeze changing continually the varied autumnal tints.

In spite of the sunlight, and the possibility of enemy aircraft appearing at any moment, the road running through the village was filled by an almost continuous stream of traffic of every kind. Such a scene, commonplace as it was, afforded me unceasing interest and amusement. Familiar faces, human and animal, called forth friendly comment or greeting. The passage of such varied traffic was the cause of innumerable incidents of the road, and in spite of the dust it was no uncommon thing to find oneself halted by the roadside, studying the physiognomy of

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the passers-by, the long lines of transport, or the columns of marching troops.

I was roused from this attitude of rumination by the appearance of an orderly who alighted from his bicycle and handed me an ordinary army message envelope.

The arrival of such envelopes was no rare incident in regimental life, and their contents were seldom momentous. The contents of this one, however, certainly savoured of excitement. In it was a single sheet of paper on which one sentence was written : " You will report at once to Divisional Headquarters for orders." Brief, and definite up to a point, the message gave me much opportunity for mental speculation, and thoughts of this kind travelled quickly through my mind as I caught hold of the orderly's bicycle and proceeded to pedal the two miles of crowded highroad to the Nissen hut which sheltered the Divisional Headquarters Staff. As I walked into the office and announced myself, I felt an unmistakable qualm as to my fate. It is an

unpleasant moment that precedes the receipt of news or orders, of the nature of which one is entirely ignorant, and which may bring about in a moment a complete and disagreeable change in one's environment. Such, however, are the fortunes of war.

After keeping me waiting a discreet few moments, the staff officer raised his eyes from his papers, greeted me with a concise "Good morning," and handed me one more small sheet of paper. I was to be enlightened by instalments.

"I don't know," he said quietly, "if you know anything of this: it is certainly a surprise to me. However, you have nothing to do but to comply."

Hardly realising the extent of the change that this fresh order was to mean for me, I withdrew from the Divisional sanctum, and, standing outside the hut, carefully examined its contents. "Capt. G.—You will proceed forthwith under these secret orders, and report personally to the General Officer commanding British Forces in Italy." I

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realised that this "scrap of paper" was to be epoch-making for me. My feelings, however, were mixed. Standing, as it were, at the door of some dark room through which I knew I had to grope my way to reach the light again, I experienced pleasure at being selected for more important and interesting duties, uncertainty about embarking into the unknown, and regret at leaving the very tolerable environment of regimental life, leaving behind me many good friends.

There was, however, now, not much time for thought. Innumerable things had to be done if Paris were to be reached that night. I returned to my hut and set about making all the preparations for departure. I went about this task undeniably thrilled at the prospect of interesting adventures before me, at the change from the monotony of regimental routine, and at the possibility of seeing a new theatre of war.

These thoughts repeated themselves during the latter part of the day, while, after I had

bidden farewell to the regiment, I travelled along the main road to Amiens in a Government lorry that I had "hopped."

It was a most beautiful evening : the red of the western sun shed a dull gold light on the foliage of surviving trees, and on the whole expanse of flat and destitute land on either side of the great highroad. Travelling in the opposite direction, like columns of phantom knights in the growing twilight, passed an endless stream of cavalry, moving up under cover of the dusk to take up their positions for the offensive. They too were riding into the unknown : they too were ignorant of their future movements. They travelling east, I west : all making towards the one great goal. How long would it be before that goal could be reached ?

PART I
THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

THE FIRST SIX MONTHS

28th November.—I made my first acquaintance with an Italian headquarters. It had been practically decided that the British should hold the Bosco di Montello, the link between the Mountain and Piave fronts, and we set out, a party of three, to visit the Italian 1st Corps, with a view to discussing Engineer services for the prospective occupation of this sector. The party consisted of General Glubb, who was our chief engineer, Colonel Pitt-Taylor, chief liaison officer, and myself. We left Padova, our first headquarters, at 8.30 a.m. in General Glubb's Rolls-Royce, a car somewhat unsuited for the road conditions. The surface of the road was excellent, but narrow and winding, and we had great trouble threading our way through droves of cattle, some of them huge

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and magnificent cream-coloured beasts, being driven in the opposite direction.

Presumably the Italian peasants thought it prudent to withdraw their herds to a safe distance in the event of a further retreat being decided upon. Curious fellows they seemed, in their slouch hats and capes. They were quite undaunted at the prospect of our car running into their animals, making no effort to clear the road for us, beating their cattle indiscriminately on the head, shouting and talking loudly amongst themselves. Eventually we arrived at Montebelluna, where we bowed to the officers of the corps headquarters. We had an amusing few minutes talking engineer technicalities with General Glubb and the Italian engineer officers, we not able to speak Italian, they speaking rather inferior French. However, we gained the information we required. Afterwards we drove up one of the many parallel roads on to the Montello, and selected a spot to eat our sandwich lunch. Much struck by the curious nature of the ground, which was

full of *dolini* and most favourable for gun positions and hidden shelters for troops.

It was a lovely day, and the view of the mountains, including the Grappa, was wonderful. One realised even then what a bastion this mountain was, and how much depended on its remaining in Italian possession. There was very little shooting or any sign of life. The Austrian presumably had not hauled his guns over the Tagliamento, and the Italians were not anxious to rouse them at this moment.

In the evening we visited the 3rd Italian Army Headquarters at Mogliano, which I was to visit so many times later. I was told that I should be working with this army, and was introduced to many of its officers.

Most of all do I remember meeting for the first time Lanza di Trebia, Duc de Camastra, a fine-looking man who, though over fifty-five, and having once been a colonel on the lines of communication, had wished to be useful nearer the front than Florence, and had volunteered to work as a subaltern in

the Intelligence Office at the Army. From the first I welcomed his society and assistance, and he was most helpful to me in the early days, owing to his intimate knowledge of French and English. More of him later.

The next day I set off in the morning to meet the 8th Italian Corps, from whom the British were to take over the line on the right of the 1st Corps. They held the sector immediately to the right of the Montello along the Piave bank, running practically south - east. The General I found to be a rather sombre though capable-looking man of the name of Caviglia. He had been with the Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War, he told me, and was very interested in the Far East. He turned out to be the man who was afterwards charged with carrying out the last offensive of the war, and early in 1919 became Minister of War in Rome. He asked me to what regiment I belonged, and was much interested, saying that he had met in the

Russo-Japanese War a certain Captain Jardine of the same regiment. He spoke English quite correctly and with a good accent, but very slowly. At a later date, when I lunched with him one day, I found that he had made great progress, and he informed me that he learnt a few new words every day to increase his vocabulary. An interesting man. Two other officers I met who were to become very good friends. Colonel Carletti, the chief staff officer of the corps, was one of the most charming men I met in Italy, though it was only after some time that we could come to a real understanding, as he could not speak English, and very little French, and I no Italian for the first few weeks. Pécol, however, the subaltern in charge of Intelligence, spoke fluent English, and after lunch we went in a large party to visit an observation post at Bavaria, close to Nervesa, whence we had an excellent view south-east of the whole of the Piave for many miles towards its mouth, as well as of the Austrian positions

on the other side of the river. On the return journey we passed the first instalment of British troops coming into billets just in rear of the line, prior to taking over the sector. They seemed already at home in their new surroundings, and on good terms with the population. Near Visnadello, we passed through the positions of the British batteries that had been (and still were) attached to the Italians for nearly a year, and who had under the greatest difficulties saved all their guns in the retreat from Caporetto.

Friday, 30th (verbatim). — In all day. Evening, first mail for a fortnight. Splendid. Bad news from France, however. Poor little Teddy (taken prisoner)! Harley arrives (to be engaged on similar work to mine) fresh from Flanders, having lived in a shell-hole for eight months! What a life! St Andrew's Day. I suppose they are watching the wall game at Eton. Russia sues for peace. Will the mania spread?

Monday, 3rd December.—I was unfortunate

during my first weeks in Italy, never succeeding in having the headlamps of my car properly in order, with the result that I used to get much annoyed if any hitch took place in my day's programme which would cause me to be back after dark. This impeded my work a good deal, and occasionally I had to run great risks on the return journey to Padova. About dusk a thick mist rises up from the dykes and low-lying fields of the Venetian lagoons, and it is not pleasant driving through it. I had a few very close shaves, and many terrifying drives.

On this morning I left Padova to visit the 54th Italian Division and go into the line at some point in their sector. I arrived at the end of lunch, and they insisted that I should take coffee. The waiter was the ugliest boy I have ever seen, with eyes screwed up and a face like a monkey's. He had been to America and had a reputation for speaking English. He was given the abrupt order, "Speak English," for my

benefit. The expression on the poor boy's face, as he racked his brain to conjure up some phrase in English, made it very difficult for me to conceal my laughter. He spoke, but not one word could I understand. The officers then began to discuss in Italian, of which I was already beginning to understand a little, as to whether I would take cognac or gin as a liqueur. In quite an animated conversation, from which I gathered that as a Britisher I ought to like gin, the gins won! Unfortunately I accepted cognac, amidst loud murmurs of disapproval.

The chief staff officer of the division, Colonel Bertini, a wiry little man with a twinkle in his eye, and a keen soldier, offered to take me into the line. During the afternoon he took great joy in halting on top of an embankment and observing with a chuckle, "*Maintenant nous sommes très en vue.*" As a matter of fact the enemy were miles away, or at any rate some hundreds of yards. We visited two different sections of the line, but could not reach a third, as we had to

pass through the hamlet of Saletto, which was being shelled consistently. The morale of the troops was good, considering what they had been through, and the amount of wiring and defensive work that they had already done was very great, considering the short time they had been on the position. There had been trouble, no doubt. They had shot a fellow that morning. "*Une petite révolte*," I was told. Anyhow, they were treating such occurrences in the right way. I had a glass of vermouth at the regimental headquarters, situated in about the only house left standing in the neighbourhood. Here I saw an Italian soldier awaiting his burial. He had been killed that morning by a shell which passed through one wall of the house.

I had a few words with a sergeant, half French, who had fought the whole of the first year of the war in the French Army. A very sound fellow. During my tour of this section I caught sight of an Austrian captive observation balloon falling

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in flames—a great sight! I had a long, cold, and disagreeable drive back in my lampless car, arriving at my headquarters late in the evening.

On Wednesday, 5th December, one or two amusing incidents happened during a visit to the 8th Corps with General H. and his B.G.G.S., General B. I was to introduce them to the officers of the Italian corps and then take them on to see a section of the line which the British corps was to take over. We were welcomed warmly by the Italians, who immediately proffered drinks. The General did not feel inclined to drink a liqueur at eleven in the morning, but he was the kindest old man imaginable. I am convinced that he mistook the Italian orderly who offered him his drink for an officer, for he patted him on the back in the most friendly manner, saying in French, “No thank you, my dear friend; I never drink before midday.” We called at Divisional Headquarters, the 58th, before going into the line, arriving in the middle of lunch.

The General refused to lunch with them, but the Italians insisted on our taking two bottles of wine to help us eat our sandwiches later. This we did on the roadside before going into the line. We borrowed a glass to drink the wine from and a chair for the General, from a neighbouring cottage. At the end of lunch the General gave a small *pourboire* to the owner of these articles, a withered old woman of doubtful age, but who proved herself to be very active. With the B.G.G.S., the chauffeur, and myself as audience, she walked round and round the General in the field, babbling unintelligibly in Italian, and kissing her hand violently at the General. It was as good as a play, and we all laughed heartily.

Thursday, 6th.—On the previous evening I had heard that the 14th Division in the 3rd Army had made an unsuccessful attempt to oust the Austrian from the one point where he had a footing on the southern bank of the Piave, namely, at Zenson. The river winds a great deal at this point. At

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Zenson itself there is a horseshoe bend in the river, the bars of the shoe facing south. The river is bounded by dykes about thirty feet high, and it was on to this dyke on the southern bank that the Austrians held. The position was curious, as, although they had only a footbridge and therefore a very perilous line of communication with the northern bank, yet locally they had the advantage, as from their elevated position on the dyke they completely overlooked the Italian trenches on the inside of the horseshoe. I called at Army Headquarters before going up to the line, to hear their explanation of the failure of the day before. It was obviously lack of sufficient artillery to back the operation.

I was taken round the line by a party of officers and soldiers which grew in size as we proceeded.

I became more annoyed each moment, as these officers would stop and talk incessantly, and pick up fresh followers. I did not wish to waste time, as I had to go round the

whole sector, and I had visions of a long journey back in my car without lamps. Apart from this, we were in full view of the Austrian most of the time, and it was not pleasant walking in a large party in daylight round very indifferent trenches with a good deal of blood about. In spite of disadvantageous conditions, and the sight of their dead comrades lying out on the dyke in front of them, the Italians were in good spirits, and I was impressed with their morale. The position, however, needed improving.

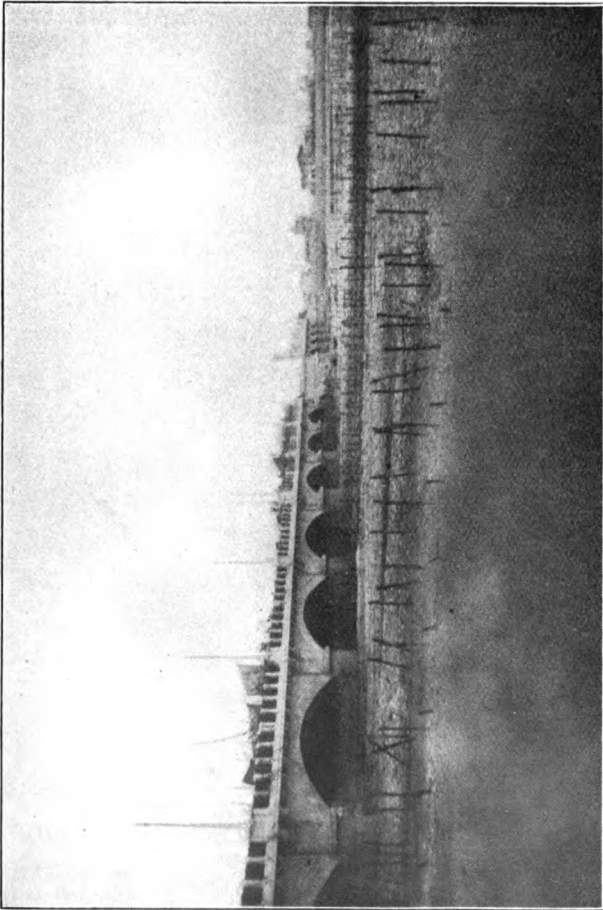
I got back at 7.30 to Padova, hoping to find that my luggage, which I had lost on the way out, had arrived. I had had no parcels from England, and was sadly running out of smokes. This and the non-arrival of my baggage was depressing.

Sunday, 9th December.—I went to lunch with General Pennella, commanding the 11th Italian Corps, which held the sector immediately on the right of the 8th Corps. The General was an enormous man both in

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height and girth, in fact everywhere, but he was extremely pleasant and kind, and entertained me very affably at luncheon. He had the reputation of being one of the cleverest and most promising of the young generals in the Italian Army. Having commenced by commanding the Brigade of Granatieri, he now had a corps, and a corps whose system of defence showed that he personally supervised every detail of its construction. He was afterwards to command an army, though in this instance he was not so fortunate. After two hours' walk round the line, a quiet sector, I called at one of the divisional headquarters, the 45th, and met the commander, General Breganze. He was a charming man, who had been three years in France on the Italian Mission, which he had left in August 1917 to return to command the 45th Division on the Italian front. He spoke French perfectly, which I found rare amongst Italian officers. They all speak a little, but even when they have a fair command of

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PONTE DELLA PRIULA.

the language their accent is very ugly. He also knew Cavendish in my regiment very well, exclaiming, "Ah oui, le bon Caviare !"

Monday, 10th.—I had a very pleasant day with Lanza di Trebia, walking round the 48th Italian Divisional line. This division, belonging to the 8th Corps, held the line in the vicinity of Ponte della Priula, two miles south-east of Nervesa. We took the army photographer along with us and snapped a most interesting aeroplane incident. An Italian aeroplane flying very low over the Austrian lines suddenly came under heavy and close shell-fire. The pilot performed some clever "stunts" to avoid the danger, and came back to his own lines at a terrific rate only about twenty-five feet over the bed of the river. A fine sight in the twilight. Altogether an exciting incident.

I made a closer acquaintance with Lanza, and found that he had stayed with my grandfather in London in 1886, and knew many members of my family. A charming fellow,

descended from Marshal Murat. Has a very nice house and garden at Auteuil, he says.

It was the next day, I think, that I went off to find my baggage at Mantova. Unfortunately, I missed the passenger train, but boarded a goods which I was assured would reach that town a very little time after the passenger train. I wanted to get to Mantova because the R.T.O. there had my baggage registration ticket and was supposed to be responsible for the recovery of the luggage.

However, my goods train stopped on a siding, and after waiting an hour I resolved to give up the quest. It happened luckily that a passenger train was returning to Padova about this time. I boarded it and travelled with two gunner officers who were coming up to join their battery. I told them of my misfortune, and arrived at Padova in the afternoon, as I thought, without meeting with any success.

The next day, the 12th December, was a long and interesting one. I started off with Lanza once more to see the Italian bridgehead

at Capo Sile, the point where the Sile Canal and the Piave converge. I set off early in my lampless car, in order to be back by dark. I called at Mogliano for Lanza, who had telephoned the Navy, who consented to provide us with a launch to take us up the Sile Canal from Portegrande. We went first to Musestre, 23rd Corps Headquarters, where we discovered that the launch did not belong to the Navy but to the Corps Headquarters, and that it was broken down and would not be ready till the evening. Things were not going so well. We were persuaded to stay and lunch, and I saw my prospects of completing my expedition by daylight quickly fading. General Petitti, a charming man, of huge dimensions, had commanded in Salonika, and spoke good French. During lunch they informed us that it was a little imprudent to go by launch, as the sound of the engine drew fire on the canal and the front-line trenches. We therefore decided not to proceed. I was much annoyed at the object of my day's outing being thus

defeated, so after lunch we went on to the Division (61st), where I met the General, Ciconetti, a strong, thick-set, rather uncouth man, with large brown eyes and short-cropped brown hair. A good practical soldier he seemed. He took up a very different attitude and was kindness itself. He reassured us concerning the possibility of the expedition and offered all assistance, including a car (with headlamps !) the whole way back to Padova. He would send us in his car from his headquarters to Capo Sile, and we could return by launch in the evening to Portegrande, whence we would be brought back to the Division, and sent on from there in a closed car. I must confess I was astonished at the General's kindness. We started off at about 3 p.m. in the open car, but we had not gone far before it failed to move through carburettor trouble, which had to be remedied. We were fated to be delayed. We had a very interesting but somewhat precarious tour round the line and across the river by footbridges, being steadily trench-mortared

the whole time. Colonel Vallo, the colonel of the regiment in the line, an excellent little man, was slightly wounded in the hand, and we sent him back to the dressing station. The trenches were knee-deep in mud, but the spirits of the troops were high. Too many, however, were kept in the front line. We got away about half an hour before dark, and walking through the hamlet of Capo Sile to the motor launch we had the experience of being sniped at as we trudged along the canal bank. We found the launch and thought we had finished what had been a tiring day. But one more misadventure yet. The motor boat spluttered and emitted clouds of smoke. Fuoco! Were we to swim ashore? No. No danger. Only the carburettor again. I seem to have a bad effect on carburettors. The Sile Canal was interesting in the twilight, as we passed the huge naval guns mounted on rafts along the banks. When we reached the car it was dark. We returned to the Division and were provided with most welcome hot coffee,

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and then sent home in a closed landaulette some sixty kilometres to Padova, my lampless car following behind. What luxury, and how pleasant it was to smoke a pipe in comfort !

On Saturday, 15th, I received an astonishing communication from one "Lieut. Blaber" that my luggage had been found in his battery baggage. I, of course, rushed off to Montebelluna to the 103rd Brigade R.F.A., "A" Battery, and was still more astonished to find in Lieut. Blaber the R.A. officer with whom I had travelled on my return from attempting to reach Mantova. I do not think I should ever have recovered my kit if I had not met him, and meeting him was the purest accident. My luggage, it is true, had been well rifled and was in a filthy condition, but they left the most useful things, and I was very glad to have it.

On Sunday, 16th, I went off in the morning with Aubrey Herbert to the Army, where we stayed some time and he met Lanza. The three of us then went off to

lunch with Petitti. On the way I was amused by Aubrey Herbert's question to Lanza, talking of Paris: "Is the Duke of Camastra still in Paris?" which elicited the curious reply: "I don't think so. I am he." Apparently in uniform Herbert had not recognised him as the same person. After lunch we went back to the Army, dropped Lanza, and drove straight back to Padova. On the way we found ourselves in the middle of an audacious daylight air-raid over the railway sidings of Mestre, a very large railway centre. In spite of clouds, a flight of Huns hovered over the railway under heavy fire. One bomb we saw fall by the side of the railway about three hundred yards to the right of us. Further on we passed three full battalions of Italian troops on the march. Their morale seemed high, and their comments were amusing. They would persist in calling us Americans. The British uniform was as yet unfamiliar to the Italians.

Tuesday, 18th.—Once more with Camastra

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to the 45th Division, to see General Breganze. Our visit to the line again showed the controlling supervision of Pennella and the good results of General Breganze's experience in France.

It was indeed the best sector in the Army front, and a very large amount of work had been done. I got home, after travelling through thick fog, at 7.30, to find the first parcels mail that I had had since arriving in Italy. Cake and apples from home, both good after over a month in the post : and a pound of tobacco ! At last my smokes are in order !

On Wednesday, 19th, I had the task of taking Pécol of the 8th Corps and other intelligence officers to meet the corresponding branch of the British 14th Corps on their left. Rather amusing trying to arrange matters between these young Italian officers and the shy, reticent fellows in the G. 2's office. However, the Italians expressed themselves delighted with their reception, and all went well.

Saturday, 22nd.—A really profitable day. I drove this time in an English car driven by an English chauffeur, borrowed from General Headquarters. I set off at 8.30 direct for Musestre. After an excellent drive I emerged from the car to find myself confronted by the noble form of Petitti, standing at the gates of the brick-coloured, flat-roofed Italian villa which lodged his headquarters. He was, as I have said, an enormous man with grey hair, a well-groomed, pointed beard, and good-natured, laughing eyes. As usual, he was kindness itself, and we talked for a long time about the situation on his corps front and the intentions of the enemy. On the way to Fornace, north of Meolo, where the 28th Division was situated, I encountered the worst roads I had yet seen in Italy—a real spring test. As a rule the roads were very good, and wonderfully well kept up, but the recent thaw had caused many of the second-class roads to break up. As I stepped out of the car it began to snow, and it was

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I remember, intensely cold. The General, Petilli by name, proved to be a very nice man, with flowing moustaches and beard, somewhat like the corps commander, though a much smaller man. I accepted his invitation to lunch at 12 and leave for the line at 1. The lunch was excellent—all from rations, they said, except the last course, fruit. Wonderful! It certainly was extraordinary how well all these officers did themselves, on about a third as much as the British officers paid in their messes. After lunch we paid a visit to the left-hand regiment of the division, the 1st Regiment of Granatieri. The commanding officer, a gaunt and well-built Italian, Colonel Dina, seemed an efficient officer, though perhaps a little nervy: a great disciplinarian. He explained to me in fluent French all his dispositions, and asked me to stay the night, offering me his own bed, and to spend Christmas Day! “The regiment has only taken over five days ago. They are now beginning to get the line in order. They

have always done their duty, and they always will." This reminds me, too, of a remark made to me by the General at lunch. "In sixteen battles," he said, "this division has seen the Austrians running away." I did not know then that the division was to see them run twice more in yet a seventeenth and eighteenth battle.

From the dyke running parallel to and about a hundred yards from the river we obtained a view of the river winding away in both directions, and of the Austrian positions. We then went down into the front line. Splendid men in splendid trenches. The best troops I had seen, by far. Not one man under six feet, and all the right age. My English chauffeur was delighted at being able to drive up so close to the line in his car, and murmured about the Ypres ramparts being much less pleasant. He was also pleased at meeting a "London Italian" of eighteen years' standing. Here, too, we saw some permissionnaires off for fifteen days' leave for Christmas. Leave

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opened again yesterday for the Italian troops for the first time since the retreat. The right moment for many reasons. The Italian takes more pride in his family and getting home for Christmas than even the Englishman, and the reopening of leave at this moment was bound to raise the morale of the troops, after the hard time they had gone through. Altogether a capital day. The 28th Divisional staff a very nice lot and full of fun.

24th December.—The only incident was my visit to the southern end of the 54th Divisional line at the Ponte di Piave. Here I was taken into some concealed machine-gun emplacements very ingeniously tunnelled into the masonry of the columns of the bridge. These emplacements were absolutely shell-proof and hidden, and should have been able to survive any preliminary bombardment. From them fire could be brought to bear across the front of the Italian positions up and down the river for nearly a mile. A very effective piece of engineer-

ing. After lunch Bertini gave me a Christmas present, a small book printed in the eighteenth century, on the schooling of horses. I believe he had found it in a ruined or abandoned villa. However, I have it now as a pleasing reminder of pleasant hours spent with this very kind man.

Boxing Day.—After a rather depressing Christmas Day, I set out once more to visit another part of the line between Zenson and Capo Sile, meeting a pleasant fellow who spoke English well, Betocchi by name. I was disappointed at the condition of the defences, and this officer also, who was doing liaison work from the Army, was inclined to agree with me. I heard afterwards that he reported to this effect to Headquarters, but through some rather unfair practice lost his job, or at any rate was transferred to another post.

The whole of this week was marked by perfect weather, during which the sun was extremely hot in the daytime, and the temperature as cold again at night. One

fact, however, worried us and prevented us all from getting enough sleep. Night after night we were bombed in Padova by German night-flying squadrons. On some occasions they came in relays from ten o'clock till four in the morning, hovering over the city under desultory artillery fire. They dropped about seventy bombs a night on this beautiful Italian city, which is about the size of Oxford. It was surprising how little damage they did and how few people they killed—perhaps two or three each night. The first time they came, curiously enough, they dropped a bomb in front of British Headquarters, killing the sentry and sending an enormous piece of shell through the Commander-in-Chief's room. Luckily, he was elsewhere, at dinner. Of course there was really no reason why the enemy should not have bombed this town, as at this moment it sheltered the Italian Comando Supremo as well as the British and French Headquarters.

On Wednesday, 2nd January, in the course

of my rounds, I met at lunch at the 13th Corps, which held the Zenson sector, the General commanding the corps, a cavalry soldier of the name of Sani. He was very cordial, and a great courtier as well as a good soldier. They told me that he knew no fear, and sometimes caused his staff great qualms in the front line by his daring and reckless contempt for danger. At his headquarters, however, he was like a king. His staff consisted of charming and interesting personalities, some of them, such as Klein, well-known men of letters in Italy. Luncheon was served, too, in a regal manner and to the music of a military band. It was well done, and the combination of military efficiency and a certain amount of pomp impressed and amused me.

On Saturday, 5th January, I went with Tharpe, our chief intelligence officer at the Mission, to visit General Pennella and the 11th Corps defences. When we arrived the General was out, attending a demonstration of a Stokes mortar bombardment, which

we heard afterwards was very successful. The Italians were learning to adopt these engines of warfare. Just before lunch we met Captain Yung, a clever and earnest officer, though perhaps lacking in sense of humour, but very much concentrated in his work of supervising the construction of defensive work on the corps front. He spoke English very well. On the return journey from an uneventful tour round the lines he was certainly impressive: "I have seen my father die, but I was not so grieved by that as having to leave the Carso!" We knew that the greater part of the Italian Army received the order to retire quite ignorant of the reason, although they felt absolutely secure in their magnificent mountain positions.

During this period we had extremely cold weather and much snow, which prevented me from undertaking many interesting expeditions. To my delight, however, I obtained permission on Saturday, 12th, to spend the week-end with the Army. Infanta, a gunner

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THE DUC D'AOSTA IN THE PIAVE TRENCHES.

officer in the G. office, fixed up very comfortable quarters for me. He was a charming fellow, and I had made great friends with him from the very first. On the Sunday I started as soon as it was light to pay one more visit to Zenson, which I had not seen since the Italians had succeeded in driving the Austrians to the northern bank of the river, thereby doing away with the one bridgehead over the Piave which the Austrians still held on to.

On my return to the Army I found a lottery in progress for various articles made by soldiers in the Army, to be balloted for for the benefit of civilian victims of the air-raids at Padova, or their relations. My ticket failed to win. On learning this, the Army Commander, the Duc d'Aosta, whose ticket had won a prize, sent for me across the room and presented me with the paper-knife he had won. He spoke English fluently, and was very kind. A few words from him were enough to convince me of his personal attraction.

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Monday, 14th, was an extremely interesting day for me. I left Mogliano at 7 a.m. in the grey light of dawn, with Maggiore Pivano, counter-battery intelligence officer, and D'Havet of the General Staff. We embarked at San Giuliano, near Mestre, on a powerful motor launch and glided along the Grand Canal at Venice in the clear morning light. A wonderful sight, and my first visit to Venice. Thence we travelled all through the Venetian lagoons till we reached Cavallino, where we saluted the officers of the Division. Re-embarking once more, we travelled along the Canal, passing naval guns mounted on rafts moored to the banks, and finally left the launch to complete our journey to the Brigade in a diminutive motor car. Next we walked along the Adriatic shore towards the trench line. We were pleased to walk, as the long hours in the launch in the early morning had chilled us. It was a wonderful day, and the sands and sea had an exhilarating influence on us. We made a three hours' tour of the line, walking through

the village of Cortellazzo, and inspected the trenches held by the marines on the actual sea-shore, the extreme right of the Allied western front.

We arrived back to the launch at 2 p.m., and enjoyed lunch during the return journey to Venice. We spent two hours in Venice, and my friends pointed out many of the most important buildings — San Marco covered in sandbags, and the lions deported into the interior of Italy. An air-raid alarm increased the excitement, but I saw no enemy aircraft. A long and interesting day. I arrived back tired after about five hours' walking, and was in bed by 9.30.

On the Tuesday evening, after yet one more excursion into another part of the line —which, by the way, I was beginning to know intimately, — I returned to Padova after a most enjoyable and fully employed week-end. The next day I went to report my doings to General Plumer, and spent the day writing up my diary, reports, and letters.

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The condition of the Italian trench line along this Army area was, practically speaking, uniform along the whole front. In the short time they had occupied the ground they had performed a phenomenal amount of work, and this under very bad conditions, in cold weather and with few men. Owing to the losses they had sustained during the retreat, and to the withdrawal of the 2nd Army out of the line to refit, the existing battalions had had little rest. Though artillery activity was slight and there was always the river between them and the Austrian, which meant that vigilance on the part of any large percentage of the garrison was only necessary by night, the troops were rarely out of the line. It is true that rations had been increased; the Italian "Fante" received more "Toscanos" to smoke, and leave had recommenced. But he had been through a great trial during the month of October, and had had no real rest since. In these circumstances the amount of work he did in the first month of the

occupation of the Piave line was nothing short of marvellous, and provides irrefutable evidence that at any rate the rank and file of the Italian Army were determined to resist on that line. It is true that the Italian staffs needed the steadying influence of the Allies to keep them from the tendency to make their dispositions with their heads over their shoulders. But everyone who knows the facts will admit that the Italian troops themselves—the backbone of the Army—had left their positions in the Carso against their wishes, under protest, and questioning the reason why; had endured the unutterable hardships of a disorganised retreat, in the most appalling weather, bombed by German air squadrons day and night, with hundreds of Austrian spies in their midst; had finally crossed the Piave, and there resolved to move no more. Though they dropped from fatigue on its banks, there were numerous instances cited of troops refusing to move another step, and the proof of their resolution was that within

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four days of their crossing, they had a system of trenches dug and three strong strands of wire put up. They used up material faster than it could be provided for them. This was the difficulty: the lack of means, not the lack of will to work: the absence of proper control, not the want of determination to fight.

On Monday, 21st January, I paid one more visit to the bridgehead at Capo Sile. I was fated each time I went to see this locality to meet with mishaps which all but spoilt my expedition. I went straight to the Corps, but was much delayed by the bad state of the roads, which had been severely broken up after the prolonged frost. I had to stay to lunch at the Corps, during which they informed me that the launch I had hoped for was not available. After lunch, however, I started off, hoping to reach my objective by road, though this way was very circuitous, and I had doubts about the conditions for motoring. We got on to the right road on our second attempt, but found

it quite impassable for motor cars, and in course of repair. At present it consisted chiefly of bundles of faggots strewn across what once was a road. The Capo Sile bridgehead had lately been enlarged by a very dashing minor operation carried out by the Granatieri Brigade, and I was very keen to see the new line.

Owing to these set-backs I decided to abandon the expedition. On the way back, however, we had to pass Portogrande, at the southern end of the Sile Canal. Here, very luckily, we found a first-rate motor launch available to take us up to the bridgehead. I spent a very profitable hour with the commander of the battalion in the line. His trenches were in good order and his men were busy improving them. He was only a captain, but perfectly undaunted ; to my probably unconcealed apprehension, he insisted on walking outside the trenches, though the area was being steadily shelled. One shell dropped amongst a group of Italians, whom I did not expect to see after

the smoke had disappeared. However, one officer only was slightly wounded. The battalion commander told me that he had been wounded seven times in the Carso, but that he was still an "enthusiast." He certainly was, and an admirable officer. He was commanding the 1st Battalion of the 226th Regiment, I think of the Arezzo Brigade.

On Thursday, 24th January, I had the curious experience of attending the Festa di Zenson, a function held for the benefit of the Italian soldiers, to celebrate the recapture of the Austrian bridgehead which I have spoken of above. The "Festa" was held in the courtyard of the corps headquarters at Roncade. The Palazzo was an ugly, castellated building, and the courtyard, surrounded by a similarly castellated wall, was covered with grass, across which ran one path of flagstones. In this very much enclosed space was gathered a great number of soldiers. First came lunch, with the military band in attendance. The Duc d'Aosta and Count of

Turin, another of the King's brothers, were present at this lunch, the former of whom made a stirring speech from the steps leading down from the Palazzo to the courtyard, where representative detachments of all the regiments in the corps were assembled. Afterwards there were sports for the men—greasy pole, sack-races, and other similar competitions, and prizes for the winners. It was something approaching a gymkhana, and I have no doubt the soldiers enjoyed it. At any rate it was a proof of the existence of a sincere though as yet elementary desire to encourage games and amusements for the men when out of the line.

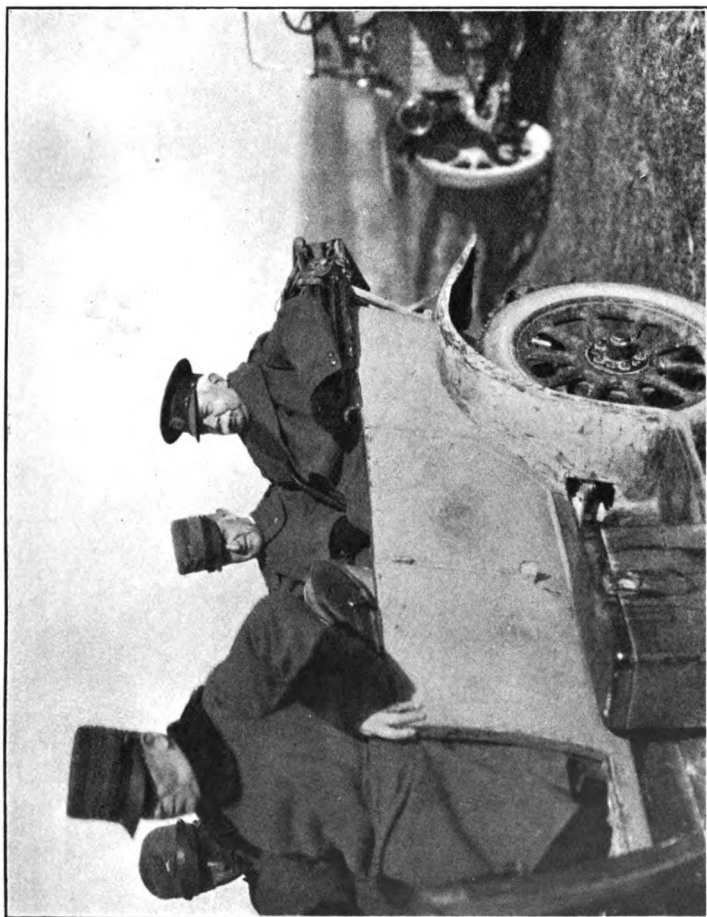
Saturday, 26th.—On a beautiful morning I motored to Campalto, a small village situated on the shore of the Venetian lagoon near Mestre, where we were to witness a demonstration at the 3rd Army Machine Gun School, an exhibition by British machine gunners of indirect machine-gun fire, of which the Italians knew little, and which they had intimated a desire to learn. The

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view was very fine, looking out over the lagoon to Venice, and in spite of the time of the year the sun was hot. Dozens of Italian staff officers arrived to see the show, and expressed themselves delighted. General Plumer and the Duc d'Aosta, who commanded the 3rd Army, went off in a car to the butts, to see the results of the shoot, and most of the G.H.Q. staff were present. An instructive morning. We were horrified to hear on the next day that the battery commander and six men had been killed in the lorry that took them home in the evening, by a bomb dropped plumb on to the roadway—damn the Huns!—and fourteen wounded besides.

On Friday, 31st, I left at 8.15 for the 11th Corps, where I found that Yung was on leave. However, they sent me on to Division (31st), where they forwarded me with Lieut. Luraschi, who I found afterwards was a brother of my great friend in the "G." office at the Army. He was, as his brother, a very good fellow, and we had a splendid

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THE DUC D'AOSTA AND GENERAL PLUMER.

walk. We met the General commanding the brigade, a cordial old man, but quiet and practical-looking, and he asked us to lunch on our return. His name was De Maria, and I was destined to make the greatest friends with him and his staff during my whole stay in Italy. During our tour of the lines I performed an act of liaison in its simplest form by introducing the left-hand Italian company commander at Pallazon to the right-hand British battalion and company commanders. Afterwards we returned to the Veneto Brigade, where General de Maria entertained us at lunch. After toasting and talking I left for the Army, where we had a great deal of fun over my recently announced promotion. After an interesting hour in conversation with Infanta about the past, present, and future of the 3rd Army, I returned to Padova in the evening.

Monday, 4th February, was my first day in the mountains. Up to this time I had only seen that part of the Italian line

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along the Piave banks. This sector resembled to a great extent our lines in France. I was to be taken by Pitt-Taylor for a day on the 4th Army mountain front, which later on I was to know so intimately. We commenced the journey by upsetting an old man off his cart. It was inevitable that every Italian peasant should travel on the wrong side of the road, as it was equally inevitable that Italian chauffeurs should take no precautions in case such a thing should happen. However, good brakes and good luck saved us, and we sailed away to the sound of a torrent of vituperation. Traveling through Vicenza and Bassano, we arrived about 10 a.m. at the foot of the Val San Liberale and embarked on to the *teleferica*. Though I was to make many journeys in this and similar air cable-ways, my first experience was somewhat unnerving. Pitt-Taylor knew this, and chaffingly did his best to frighten me. However, I clutched the side of our iron basket and shut my eyes firmly. Reports varied as to the safety of

this form of travelling for human beings. However, this time there was no choice. After a quarter of an hour's suspension and suspense we were finally dumped on Archeson, whence we started our day's work. I was immensely interested in this first glimpse of how the Italians waged war in the mountains. At this part of the line—that is, immediately east of the Grappa—the mountains on their southern side drop absolutely precipitously into the valley, some three thousand feet below. On the face of these mountains the Italians had constructed a system of mule-tracks winding up to their positions, all designed to allow reinforcing troops to come up from the plains with the minimum amount of congestion and fatigue, and in the shortest time. Along the top of this sheer precipice was what was called the Marginal Road, a road or track running from east to west along the whole of the Army front. The great advantage of these tracks was that they were, by reason of the course they took, concealed from view

from the enemy and practically impossible to touch with artillery fire. Dotted about the side of the mountains were hundreds of small tents made for four men, about six feet square, each standing on a little ledge of rock. These grey tents were so similar in colour to the rock that from any distance it was impossible to see them, and they must have been invisible from the air. On still larger ledges dug out of the rock were erected shelters for stores and munitions and stables for mules. Mules performed work in this mountain warfare which was nothing short of marvellous. It was no rare sight to see a procession of mules carrying rations of all sorts, skins of wine or water, timber for the construction of huts, corrugated iron, ammunition, forage, and every kind of accessory to war in the mountains. The Italian soldiers appreciated the value of these animals and kept them in splendid condition. We laughed many times at instances of extraordinary obstinacy, and very often good sense, shown by mules, but never once did I see

a case of cruelty from those who cared for them. They always looked well treated, well fed, and well groomed. The Italian soldiers regarded them as their best friends. I must mention, however, that the same was not always my experience in the case of horses, especially draught and gunner horses, in the plains.

Another feature which struck me on my first visit to this front was the wonderful way in which the Italian gunners man-handled their guns into position. Guns of all sizes were to be seen perched on almost inaccessible positions, sometimes mere pinnacles of rock, and it was easy to understand why the gunner, once installed, preferred to remain in position a very long time, rather than descend frequently to so-called rest in the plains.

We walked for some three hours towards and up to the Grappa, where we came upon the headquarters of the Lombardia Brigade and halted for a few minutes. We refused very insistent invitations to lunch, but I

made Pitt-Taylor accept an egg and some coffee. Afterwards we sat down and ate our sandwiches before starting the walk down Monte Frontal. It was our intention to inspect a line of reserve trenches which ran down this spur. We started on our journey, but found the walking so difficult, perched as we were on the razor-back slope with precipices on each side of us, that I finally struck, and Pitt-Taylor was persuaded to take the safer course on the mule-track below. After a long two hours' walk we finally reached the car and travelled, very tired, back to Padova, where dinner awaited us, to be followed shortly afterwards by an air-raid which lasted most of the night.

On Thursday, 7th February, I repaired again to the river front, in the sector just to the left of Capo Sile. I visited the 146th Regiment of the Catania Brigade. The Colonel was on leave, but the officer commanding the 3rd Battalion, De Renze by name, was commanding the regiment, and was, I thought, too good a soldier to have

only a battalion under his charge. I was surprised at lunch to see glasses, table-cloth, and napkins, in a dug-out within thirty yards of the front line! Afterwards I walked for two hours and a half round the whole regimental front, accompanied by a subaltern with a bald head and a French wife (he told me).

On Monday, 11th, I paid another visit to Colonel Dina and the Granatieri Brigade, holding this time the Salettuel sector. He entertained me very kindly and took me, with the Brigadier, General Rossi, round part of his line. Here, as in the former sector, I had an opportunity of seeing fine troops in occupation of trenches in the state of which they took an obvious pride. Discipline and efficiency prevailed everywhere, and the men looked well. Colonel Dina was not in particularly good health, and asked me if I could possibly procure him some special tabloids he wanted from Padova, and send them to him. I said I would be delighted. These I purchased the next day, and on the

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Wednesday motored round to his billet, whither the regiment had now gone into rest, and presented them to him, to his great pleasure. He was busy re-equipping his men and carrying out inspections after the recent spell in the trenches.

On Thursday, 14th, I went up with Major Bridge, our staff officer with the Italian 4th Army, on to that Army front, though further to the west than before. We motored up the main Grappa road from Bassano and branched off towards Col Moschin. We paid a visit at Col Raniero to the General commanding the Alpi Brigade which afterwards went to France. Garibaldi, nephew of *the* Garibaldi, was in command, the only non-regular soldier in the Italian Army who had attained the rank of Brigadier. He had achieved this at the age of thirty-nine, which was exceptionally young for the Italian Army. Afterwards we walked down through the woods, inspecting one of the main Asolone switch-lines, down into the Val San Lorenzo, and at the

bridge where the Grappa road crosses this valley, rejoined the car. A beautiful day and a lovely piece of country.

It was about this time that the opportunity came to me of going on leave to England. I had practically arranged this when I heard of a prospective offensive operation which was to be undertaken by the 28th Italian Corps. The object was to carry forward the line, which now ran from Musile along the Old Piave, right up to the New Piave, thus shortening the line and at the same time advancing some five miles. I thought this operation would prove an interesting one, as the 5th British Division was to make a diversion by a big raid carried out contemporaneously over the Piave on the Palazzon front. As I did not wish to miss this first offensive effort made by the Italians since the retreat, I went down to consult my friends at the 23rd Corps, who could not tell me the actual date, because it was not yet settled. They advised me, however, not to go to England, as the

time necessary for the journey, and fourteen days' leave, would not permit of me getting back in time. The prospect of English leave, therefore, was indefinitely postponed. As time wore on, however, the weather became worse, and rain fell so continuously that the Piave rose considerably. The ground over which the Italians would have had to operate, and which in normal times was mostly marsh and lagoon, became absolutely waterlogged. After many days of waiting for improvement in this respect, and to everyone's disappointment, the operation was abandoned.

It was during this period—actually on 6th March—that I experienced in one day the first two motor accidents that I had in Italy. As I have mentioned before, no Italian has any idea of traffic regulation or discipline of the road. The military are perhaps better than the civilians, but they are reckless drivers, though skilful, and nothing will make them take even reasonable precautions or keep the rules of the road.

The "carabinieri" or military police have very little authority in this direction, and make hardly any effort to control traffic. I was travelling to the British Mission, which was now at Tremonte, near Padova, and my chauffeur, an Englishman, was about to pass an Italian lorry which was stationary on the side of the road. For some reason the Italian driver, without giving any warning, proceeded to turn his lorry into the middle of the road, practically in front of us. He hit my car's front wheels and sent us flying towards a twenty-foot embankment by the side of the road. We stopped in time, but the steering-gear of my car was put out of order, and I had to leave it at the Mission and borrow an Italian Fiat to return to the British Corps, where I was staying at the time. On the return journey, I was being driven by an Italian, and was about to pass a small cart drawn by a miserable, thin white pony. We were going, I suppose, thirty miles an hour against a strong wind, and my chauffeur blew the horn as he was

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approaching the cart ; but the driver could not have heard, for at the moment when we were about to pass, the driver, a soldier, suddenly turned the pony straight across the road, meaning, as I saw afterwards, to turn to the left into a small concealed lane. My car hit the pony in the shoulder, lifted it right off the ground and along the mudguards, and finally deposited the poor beast on its side in the roadway. I hardly realised what had happened, as I was reading a letter in the back of the car. The driver of my car had his finger slightly cut owing to the glass screen breaking ; the driver of the cart was knocked off and fell on his face, which was now covered with mud and slightly cut ; and the pony died in half a minute, though it showed no outward sign of a wound. By the look of it, however, I should judge it happier dead than alive. The Italian soldier driver was wailing disconsolately about "*mio povero cavallo*" when an Italian medical officer drove up in another car. After I had explained matters to him, this officer

very kindly took the wounded and wailing boy off to hospital. It turned out that he was a permissionaire driving back to return to the front, and that now he would without serious personal injury obtain extra leave. And the pony was not his. However, except for the wretched pony, we had all escaped luckily; and I had to return and borrow yet another car from the British Mission. I made my third chauffeur for the day promise to drive me slowly and prudently, and I arrived back at the Corps much delayed, after a rather too exciting day.

Soon after this I learnt that changes were taking place in our liaison staff, and that now I should be required to live and liaise with the 4th Italian Army holding the Grappa sector, at the same time keeping touch with events in my old 3rd Army on the Piave front. I was now to know both the mountains and the plains. There were busy and varied days before me. At first I thought the task would be too big for me, and that I should lose touch with my many

friends in the 3rd Army. However, I was interested in the prospect of seeing more of the mountain front, and pleased at the idea of living actually with the Italians with whom I had to work.

On 11th March I went to Cittadella, my prospective new home, met Bridge, who was leaving the Army, and was introduced to everyone at Headquarters.

On Wednesday, the 20th, I had a most interesting day. I had been asked to lunch with Brigadier-General Rossi, commanding the Granatieri Brigade, now at rest near Treviso. During lunch I learnt that there was to be a review afterwards, to which I was invited, with Parisot, the French liaison officer with the 3rd Italian Army. We adjourned afterwards to the Campo di Marte, where I stood on the left of the General at the saluting post and watched the whole of the 2nd Regiment march past, including mule-pack transport. Considering there was no music, as the band had gone on leave, the marching was very good, and the physique

of the men excellent. We then went on to the racecourse, where the same procedure was gone through with the 1st Regiment, commanded by Colonel Dina. Altogether a first-class brigade. Afterwards I left Parisot, and Luraschi, also one of the party, joy-riding in Treviso, while I went straight to Cittadella, where I found comfortable quarters ready for me. Here I was now living with the Italians. A real opportunity to learn the language.

I had now no time to waste. I wanted to get to know my new Army front as quickly as possible. The first few visits I paid to the sector were of a general character, as I wished to gain some knowledge of the topography of the mountains, to which I was utterly unused.

One particularly good day I had on the 30th March. I left Army Headquarters at 8 a.m. on the most beautiful morning imaginable. The mountains stood out in the clear atmosphere as if they were being viewed through a stereoscope, and every-

thing shone with the light and warmth of the spring sunshine. It was the right morning to obtain a good view. One had to be up in the mountains fairly early, as the atmospheric conditions, especially on and around the Grappa, so often caused the sky to become clouded and a mist to rise about midday. Calling at the Corps Headquarters on the way, I asked them to telephone to the Brigade that I was coming, and asked that they should be informed who I was, and of the object of my visit. I went up in the same *teleferica* as on my first trip, alone this time, and none too sure of myself. However, I was able this time to open my eyes and admire as fine a view as one could wish to see. All round me were the steep mountain slopes, partly covered with pine-woods, the sheer narrow gorges, the innumerable mule-tracks winding their way up the mountain, and the minute figures of the bodies of men and transport gradually receding and diminishing in size as I was borne upward. Further away to

the south stretched the plains, laid out like a vast carpet of various shades of brown and fresh green, divided into small rectangular patches, and the innumerable roads fading away into the distance. As my cage rose higher the view over the plains became dimmer and presently almost invisible. The morning haze hung like a canopy separating the mountain from the plain. Above, however, the sky shone a deep blue against the brown and grey of the mountains: the snow on the Grappa and some of the higher peaks sparkled in the sun. The air was keen and exhilarating. But for the occasional thunder of some great cannon echoing and resounding through the rocks, it was difficult to recognise these surroundings as the scene of warfare.

I was met at the top by a soldier from the Brigade (Emilia), who took me to the headquarters, where I was received very kindly. They gave me an officer as guide, with whom I climbed to the top of Monte Meate, and from here a magnificent view

towards the north unfolded itself. My guide pointed out the Italian line running round the salient towards Monte Valderoa, on the right along the ridge running from Monte Spinoncia to Monte Pallone, on the left from Valderoa south-westwards to Solarolo, Col del Orso, and the Grappa. Further away to the north one could see the summit of the Spinoncia, in Austrian hands, the Fontana Secca, and numerous distant and snow-clad peaks. I found it difficult in one visit to grasp all this new scene, but I understood it in outline, and was amazed at its beauty. After lunch we sallied forth again to view the line further to the right of Spinoncia, and from a tunnelled observation post had a fine view through a telescope of the whole of the front of the Monte Tomba position, the Val del Ornic stretching itself out towards Alano and the Piave, and the Austrian positions on Monte Spinoncia. It was easy to recognise the importance of the Grappa position. This huge bastion, some

five thousand five hundred feet high, with its oval, rounded summit, resembles some huge octopus throwing out tentacles on each side of it. These tentacles stretch westwards along Monte Rivon, Coston, and Asolone, eastwards along Boccaor, Meate, Pallone, Tomba, and Montfenera, north-eastwards along the Solarolo-Valderoa ridge, and northwards over Pertica and Prassolan. Besides these main ranges branching off the Grappa there are many minor spurs. Southwards, down the Musce, Frontal, and Cornosega spurs, the mountains fall almost precipitately, and it was obvious that if the Grappa were lost there would have to be a very large retirement into the plains. The position was a good one, but lacked depth. It had to be regarded as a line of resistance to the last, for the loss of it would mean an inevitable retirement for many miles, with perhaps momentous consequences. As a starting-off line for an offensive, however, it was splendid, supported as it was by magnificent lines of communication. In the wonderful

system of first-class roads which characterised the plains of Veneto, the Italians had a great advantage over the Austrians, whose communications ran for hundreds of miles through mountain-passes with few roads or railways. I shall speak later of the way in which the Italians took advantage of this great asset, and of the high degree of efficiency in which they maintained these roads.

On Easter Sunday, the 31st, I went by special invitation to visit my friends in the Brigato Veneto, down once more on the Piave front. I arrived at 9.30 in the morning, and was very surprised at being rushed at and kissed by Captain Locatelli, the brigade-major. I tried to think of any English brigade-major who was so fond of me as to risk such an attack. Afterwards I attended Mass, held in the open a few yards behind the line and quite impressive. The General in great form, but rather tired. Poor old man! he had been out amongst the troops since 5 a.m., wishing them the

compliments of the season. After lunch we went out again to see the soldiers' games, where yet one more opportunity was taken of offering drinks to the assembled company. The games were of the usual sort, but rather tame. However, the soldiers enjoyed themselves, and one of them sang pleasant Neapolitan songs to the strains of a guitar. I returned to dine at the Army, where all were equally hospitable. I finally arrived back at Cittadella at 11 p.m. This was the most festive Easter Sunday I ever remember spending.

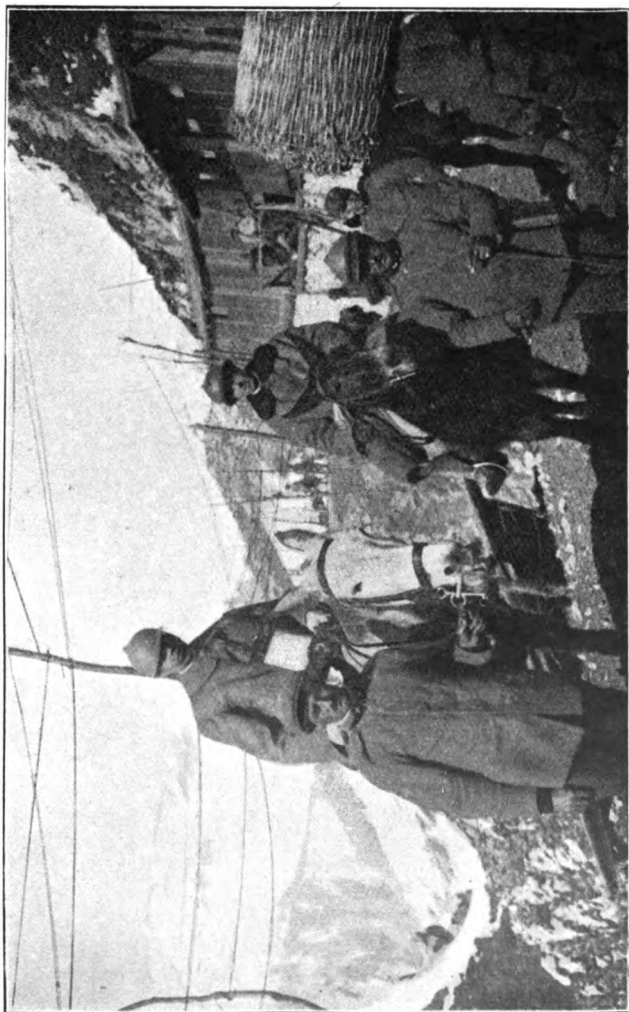
During the ensuing week I made some interesting and more detailed expeditions to different parts of the 4th Army front. On the Tuesday after Easter I left the Army shortly after 8, and picked up Lieutenant Caccia, whom I had first met attached to the Brigata Alpi with Garibaldi. We went off to visit the extreme left of the line, north of Col Moschin. Though neither the approach to the line nor the trenches themselves could be called good, the troops

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holding them were doing their best to improve them. The ground was difficult and rocky, and the work of digging trenches very tiring for the men. The view was wonderful from this point where the mountains dropped sheer into the Brenta valley on both sides of the river.

On Wednesday, 3rd April, I went in a large party for a most amusing and interesting day. The chief members of the party, which was truly inter-Allied, were Gillard, the French liaison officer with me at the Army, with whom I made great friends, and two cavalry officers of the 5th Novara Lancers, Bianchi and Alvisi, both the most charming and amusing fellows, who were doing liaison work between the Italian Comando Supremo and the 4th Army. Their special wish and plan was to visit in this sector of the line two battalion commanders, old officers in their own regiment, who had volunteered for the infantry some eight months before, and were both given battalions in the Brigata Re, doing excellent

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BIANCHI AND ALVISI ON THE 4TH ARMY FRONT.

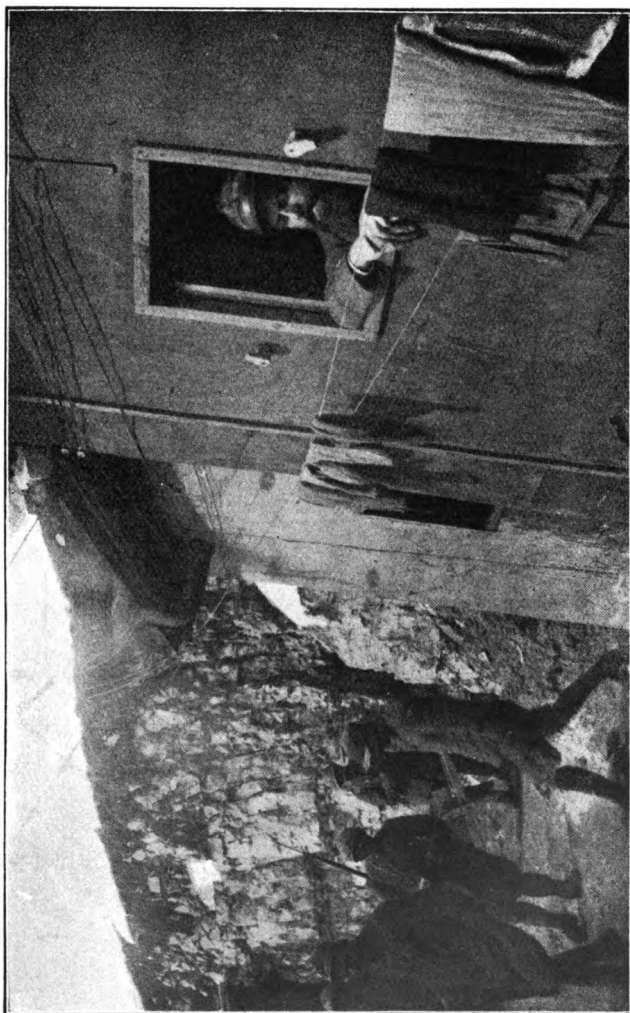
service. I had already met both these officers once while walking round this sector on a former visit, but I was now to meet them more intimately and to enjoy their hospitality. This time we lunched with Maggiore Grisi, while the other battalion commander came over from his headquarters to join us. We sat down in his hut, splendidly furnished with every comfort, about two hundred and eighty yards behind the line, and it was great fun seeing this meeting of so many officers of the same regiment. De Robilant, the other battalion commander, was a very charming man, nephew of the General in Paris. He showed me some amusing and clever caricatures that he had drawn, and promised me one of the party of visitors. I saw these two officers on frequent occasions afterwards, both in the line and at rest, and of none that I met in Italy do I hold more pleasant souvenirs. I hope that I may be able to meet them again. Both of them were officers of the very best type, loved by their men, self-denying

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and patriotic. They had known the delights of peace, fox-hunting in the Campagna Romana and racing in Rome and Milan. They had given up their squadrons to take part in the monotony and hardship of trench life. I could not help admiring them, not so much for what they had done and were doing, but for what they had voluntarily given up to do it.

On Thursday, 4th, I started off at 8.30 to examine the Grappa itself. The weather was atrocious when we got up into the mountains, and the snow and dense mist prevented us seeing any view. We succeeded, however, in finding Colonel Gavotti, who was the organiser of all the work then being carried on actually inside the Grappa. He was a large but very kindly man with a fair, flowing beard and blue eyes. He showed us the plans of his work and the work itself with quiet but just pride. A most wonderful feat of engineering. Here, five thousand feet above the sea-level, he had constructed since Christmas nearly three

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COLONEL GAVOTTI AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE GRAPPA GALLERIES.

miles of gallery through the solid rock of the Grappa. These galleries were sometimes ten feet high, and were lit by electric light. They consisted of one large tunnel with frequent branches on each side leading to caverns where batteries of mountain and field artillery were in position to fire through small mouthpieces in the side of the mountain. The main tunnel formed a covered and secure communication trench for troops going to the positions immediately north of the mountain, as well as an approach to the various and numerous observation posts and battery positions. There were also large caverns for water-tanks, ammunition, and reserve rations. The idea was to constitute in the inside of the Grappa a self-sufficing, self-contained fort within the rock. It was a wonderful idea, and wonderful in execution. But it had its disadvantages, which might have utterly discounted its usefulness. It is true that asphyxiating gas has very little effect in the mountains, except in deep gorges or valleys, owing to the divergent

currents of air. But if the enemy had deluged the whole surface of the mountain for several hours with poison gas, the internal defences might have become paralysed, and the galleries have constituted a death-trap for those within. Even if anti-gas defence measures could keep out the poison itself, then began the problem of ventilation. These problems were receiving the attention of the Army while work was being carried on, and no doubt, had the war continued, they would have been solved. At all events it was a wonderful feat, and before I left the Army front there were twenty-eight batteries of 105-mm. and lower calibre guns actually in action within these galleries.

On Sunday, 7th April, I had a very interesting visit to the Intestadura sector, rather an unsavoury part of the line. I was lucky to find the man I wanted, who happened also to be holding the sector I wanted to see. I talked with Colonel Renze for some time in his dugout, which he told me had been the object of some

attention during the night from the enemy's trench mortars, and then walked round his line. We went into the apex of the salient, in the lock dividing the Old from the New Piave. The Austrian trench was only five yards away, nearer than at any point on the Italian front, and our conversation was naturally confined to whispers. It was, however, very interesting, and his men were in good spirits.

The next day I visited the Montello, which was now held by the 8th Italian Army. It had been left by the British, who by this time had taken over on the Asiago Plateau. Thus still one more Army front, though this time a short one, was added to my total, and I was beginning to know intimately all parts of the line from the Brenta to the sea. My old friends, the 8th Corps, held part of the sector, and I resolved to spend the day in their area. Colonel Galamini from the 4th Army went as far as the Corps with me, as he wished to see the new General, Gandolfo, under whom he

had formerly served. I picked up an old friend, Stucchi by name, from the Intelligence branch of the Corps, and we spent the morning on the Montello. On regaining the car, which we had left on one of the many lateral roads on the Montello, we found that one tyre was punctured and that my chauffeur had chosen to leave the jack behind. However, we enlisted the services of about half a dozen Italian sappers who were working on the road near by, and with the aid of a heavy piece of timber we prised the car upwards sufficiently to change the wheel. At lunch I met General Gandolfo, a charming man, who had proved his gallantry earlier in the war, when in command of a brigade, during the first Austrian gas attack. Though badly gassed himself, and in spite of very heavy casualties in his brigade, he rallied the remainder, and personally led a counter-attack which re-established the situation.

The Montello is a most curious formation, and there is no place on the Italian

front where it is more difficult to find one's position on the map, or more easy to lose oneself completely. It resembles in formation half a potato, laid skin upwards on the ground. About seven miles long from east to west and three miles broad, it rises at some points to the level of a little over a thousand feet. The ground itself is covered with undergrowth and heather, and is extremely broken. The whole plateau formed on its summit is covered with *dolini*, or small, irregular, concave pits varying in size and sometimes over a hundred feet deep. At this period of the year the undergrowth looked beautiful, and the whole ground was covered with wild spring flowers. A lovely place for picnics, of which it was the scene of many, I was told, before the war. It was intersected by over twenty tracks running from north to south, bounded generally by hedges and joined together by numerous cross-tracks. The Italians had numbered all these, and had made most of them practicable for wheeled traffic. Otherwise

it would have been impossible to distinguish one from the other. The view in all directions obtained from different points on the plateau is unrivalled, and we enjoyed a very pleasant walk. In spite of the blood-thirsty struggle that took place over part of this ground during the Austrian offensive later in the year, I was very glad to see afterwards that its beauties had not been entirely destroyed by the ravages of war, and I should think that, once the numerous trench-lines have been filled in and the few farmhouses dotted about have been rebuilt, it will very soon resume its pre-war aspect.

On Tuesday, the 9th April, I enjoyed once more the hospitality of my friend Di Robilant of the Novara Lancers. We left the Army in a large party shortly after 8 in the morning, and from Vettorazzi took the *teleferica* up to Montfenera. I travelled in the cage with Alvisi, who was terribly affected by being suspended in mid-air. I sympathised with him very much, as there are few things more disagreeable than travel-

ling in these air cable-ways, if one is really addicted to "vertige." However, the mere fact that he was more affected than I was, made me feel extremely brave and secure. We made a long and comprehensive tour of the Montfenera trench-line, and I went down into the salient north of Monte Castello. The morning was a fine one and the view magnificent. We had amusing conversations with the Italian soldiers, and after this interesting walk through good deep trenches with short lengths of fire-step, dug with pick and spade out of the rocky ground (an immense work), we arrived at our host's headquarters at one o'clock. We had a splendid luncheon party, and laughed a lot over Bianchi's joke, "*Beaucoup de Zabaione*." They asked us to lunch again, and Bianchi declared that I would not come unless I was provided with "*Beaucoup de Zabaione*." It certainly was delicious, made of whipped-up eggs and marsala. A successful and amusing day.

On Thursday, 11th, I had a long walk

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and an instructive day in the company of Colonel Gariboldi, the chief of "Operations" of the Army, Pitt-Taylor and Bianchi, over a large sector of the 4th Army front. From Col Raniero, where we made a tour of the defences of that hill and studied the system of which it was a part, we walked down into the Val San Lorenzo, where we lunched by the roadside. Afterwards we drove to Monte Oro and walked down along the trench-line to Capitello, negotiating a small precipice at the end. A long and interesting day, with a good deal of discussion of detail. I went up again the next day on to Monte Oro, to the point whence we started our tour the day before, and continued my inspection of the line in the opposite direction, towards the Grappa. We (Bianchi and myself) met the Italian engineer officer in charge of the work, which was going on well, and were shown round. He insisted on taking our photographs (the Italian regulations against cameras in the war zone were winked at), and asked us to lunch on

any future occasion on which we might be up in his neighbourhood. They really are most hospitable people. We ate our lunch in Colonel Gavotti's hut, and then made an extensive tour of the galleries, which had grown considerably since I had last seen them, and the view over the Pertica and Prassolan was magnificent. We entirely overlooked the Austrian trenches. As on the day before, we did not get back to the Army until 6 p.m.

On Monday, the 15th, I left my headquarters at 8 sharp to visit yet another part of the line towards Osteria del Lepre, at the head of the Val San Lorenzo. After about three hours' walking and a long tour round the line, I returned to regimental headquarters to be entertained by the Colonel, Canzone by name, a kind but very voluble Neapolitan.

I had recently learnt that the Italians were going to send an Expeditionary Army Corps to France, of which one of the brigades was the Alpi, commanded by Garibaldi, of whom

I have spoken before. Galamini, formerly of the Alpi Brigade, Gillard, and I planned to visit him in the line on the Monte Pallone to bid him farewell. The weather was bad, and our *teleferica* cage was shrouded in the mist as we all three were borne upwards towards Archeson. However, we walked to the General's headquarters, where we found him very pleased with himself, and delighted with the idea of going to France.

Though they were due to be relieved very shortly, the men did not know their ultimate destination, and news of their prospective departure had been kept secret. The General was in the best of form, and spoke English and French very well indeed. He and his brigade had a hard time in France afterwards, and I never saw him again. But he was proud to go and share in the fighting on the French front, where the struggle at this time was so intense.

On Saturday, 20th April, I set out at 7.45 and made a complete tour of the line from Monte Castello and through Pederobba, at

the point where the mountain front and the river front joined. On Monte Castello we came in for some undesirable shelling. It was nearly 11.30, however, at which time, the Italians told me, the Austrians lunched, and invariably stopped firing. Almost punctually at this hour the firing ceased, and we were able to proceed unmolested down to Pederobba. The whole of the road from Pederobba eastwards to Caniezza was under direct enemy observation, and, although heavily screened, no traffic was allowed along it in the daytime. We had to walk, therefore, to the village of Caniezza, where we found the car awaiting us. I went back for a moment to the 1st Corps, where we had tea and talked with friends. The A.D.C. was a nice young fellow, Sailer de la Tour, son of the Italian ambassador at The Hague.

Back to Cittadella, my Army Headquarters, shortly after 5 p.m.

The next day I had a successful expedition in spite of atrocious weather. I

left at 8 a.m., called at the Corps Headquarters, and picked up Caccia, whom I had originally met on my first visit to the Alpi Brigade, to which he was attached at the time, and together we motored up the Grappa road as far as Osteria della Cibera. From here we walked in the pouring rain up the southern slopes of Asolone. As we climbed higher the rain turned to snow, and we were soon in a heavy snowstorm; we examined the front line, which, in spite of the weather, was in fairly good condition; trenches cut out of the rock and dugouts drilled right out of the mountain similar to mine shafts. We walked all along the line in a westerly direction down to the head of the Lorenzo valley, and thence to the bridge, where the car awaited us. On the way an orderly informed us that the Army Commander had sent for me and wished to see me at 5. I was ignorant of the nature of this call, but it was impossible for me to be back and changed out of my drenched clothes till nearer 7 o'clock than 5. At

about this hour I walked into the office and was hastened into the Army Commander's presence in slacks and without a belt. He was leaving the Army and wished, he said, to show his appreciation of my services before he left : whereupon he presented me with the very handsome, though, I fear, ill-deserved decoration of the Crown of Italy.

On Tuesday, 23rd April, I paid a visit to Monte Boccaor and the Aosta Brigade. This brigade was one of the finest in the Italian Army, and was made up mostly of men drawn from Sardinia. It was commanded by General Bencivenga, formerly Cadorna's personal secretary. I found him to be a charming man and a good practical soldier. During the day he told me many interesting and amusing stories about various political, military, and diplomatic personages whom he had met amongst the Allies. He insisted on mounting me on one of his mules, to go with him to see the line. We, or rather the mules, climbed the Monte Medata, whence we had a splendid view directly

below us of the whole sector under his command. The Monte Medata is at the head of the Val Calcino, and commanded a wonderful view of the Italian positions on Col del Orso, Solarolo, Valderoa, and Spinoncia.

During the next few weeks I went for frequent expeditions into the mountain front, where conditions were improving daily. I had made great friends with a gunner, Colonel Sagna by name, on the staff of the Army, an amusing Neapolitan, with a great sense of humour. He was also a good staff officer, and practical. He was always keen to leave the office and visit various parts of the line, and I had the pleasure of his company on several occasions. On the 1st of May we moved out of Cittadella, three miles eastwards to Galliera, where practically the whole Army Headquarters were accommodated in a huge villa belonging to Signor De Michele. I made his acquaintance, and that of his family, and used to go and call on them frequently in the evening. Round

the park in which the villa stood, he afterwards put up some jumps to amuse the officers of the Army Headquarters and to school his own horses, of which he still kept a few in spite of the war. He was a great lover of horses and was enthusiastic when I invited him later on to come to one of our British Divisional horse-shows.

On the 4th May I left at 8 a.m. with Sagna and Ferrari, another officer of the Army, for one more expedition to Tomba. One could always return, as I did, to any part of the line any number of times, as there was always something new to be seen: always new work completed, new features to appreciate in the geography of the trenches, new troops holding the line. We walked for over four and a half hours, finishing after 2 o'clock in the village of Caniezza, where we enjoyed the lunch we brought with us, helped by a doctor-major's soup. Altogether a good day, but very hot.

The summer was now beginning in earnest,

and it was often very hot in the middle of the day. The dust on the roads was very trying, though the Italian authorities did their best to keep it down. Almost always, at frequent intervals along all the main roads were stationed old men or girls, each armed with a long stick some ten feet long, with a tin cup on the end of it. This weapon they wielded with a regular swinging motion from the dykes which bordered every road in the Veneto plains, on to the road, each time spreading a small quantity of water over the road—a primitive but surprisingly successful method. These peasants worked very quickly in spite of the heat, and one of them would keep a long stretch of road well watered all day. Nearer the villages one often met water-carts, also of a very rudimentary kind—large barrels of water mounted on the framework of a cart, drawn by a mule or pony. At the end of the barrel at the back of the cart hung a leather pipe, generally a fairly large one. The end of this pipe was sewn up, but it had a hole in

it about a yard from the barrel. A small child or girl would hold the closed end of this pipe and walk along the road behind the cart swinging it from side to side, showering the road with water. As will be seen from maps of this part of Italy, the roads are numerous, and they are certainly kept in wonderful condition. Excellent material, consisting of small stones rounded by the mountain torrents, lies in the dykes on the side of every road, and no carting is necessary. They are simply dug out of the ditch. The same peasants spend their day filling up any holes there may be in the road with these small stones. They add a little earth, and pour water on to the mixture. The rest is left to the traffic. Tyres do not puncture by passing over these stones, and if any are displaced, the road-makers walk along with a hoe and replace the stone to its proper destination. The result is wonderful. Never could any traveller wish to meet a better road surface, and on long stretches there is no limit, save

the power of your motor engine, to the speed that can be attained.

On Sunday, 5th May, an amusing incident occurred as I was calling at the headquarters of a division in order to return a walking-stick belonging to one of the officers whom I knew. The division were at rest and were living in a charming villa near Treviso. I walked in after lunch on this beautiful spring afternoon, and was led into the garden, where the divisional band was playing to the assembled officers. On my appearing, I think at the end of a piece, they immediately commenced playing "God save the King" through from beginning to end, at a very slow speed, while I remained in an embarrassed and solitary position, standing at the salute throughout the performance. I stayed on afterwards for half an hour, sitting in this pleasant garden, listening to the band's selection. They were all very kind and complimentary to the British.

The next day also was an interesting one,

when I was taken a tour of inspection round a cavalry regiment in billets, the Firenze Lancers, of which regiment I knew several officers. The horses looked extremely well, considering the small quantity of forage allowed. Some of the young officers I met were excellent young fellows and of the right sort, and I promised to arrange a similar tour for them round a British regiment in Italy.

I was now becoming much more proficient in the language, and found it pleasant and, needless to say, very useful, being able to carry on my own conversations with officers, non-commissioned officers, and men that I met in my tours round the line. The Italian soldier was very intelligent and quick, and much interested in events in other theatres of war. On many occasions now I found myself surrounded by small groups of soldiers, from whom I gained much useful information with regard to their outlook on life, the conditions of things in the line, and details of their own

homes and families. I discovered that the Italian soldier had a very pleasant and willing disposition, and I was sure, when properly led, would make the finest fighting material.

During this period also I had some very interesting talks with staff officers of various grades with reference to plans for an offensive which were in course of preparation (though they never matured), with the object of deepening the mountain position of the Army by taking the line forward approximately on to the line Prassolan—Col Bonata—Col Caprile: this operation to be followed by the capture of Valderoa and Spinõncia, the summits of which were still held by the Austrians. The discussion arose from the fact that the Army staff proposed commencing the operation from the left, while many of the officers of formations actually on the ground were of opinion that, if the operation were not to take place concurrently all along the line, the easiest and most practical way of carrying the objective would be to commence by the capture of

Pertica and Prassolan, and follow this up immediately by an advance on both flanks. There was a very good line of approach up the Prassolan : not too steep a slope, a feature upon which it was very important to calculate in mountain warfare, and once attained it would seem impossible for those holding the Asolone and Col della Beretta positions to remain where they were, or be reinforced. Whereas, as was proved by actual events at a later date, it was impossible for the Italians to maintain the Asolone position with the Austrian still in possession of Prassolan. In the same way the Italians were unable to stay on either Valderoa or Spinoncia while the enemy held the other of either of them. The operation, however, was abandoned in view of persistent rumours of an Austrian offensive on a very large scale, and on account of the lack of reserves.

In one of my expeditions about this time I saw the King of Italy on one of his inspections. I arrived one day at a

Divisional Headquarters where I wanted to make some important inquiries, but immediately before I obtained my interview with the chief staff officer, the King appeared in a large car on the road below the Divisional Headquarters hut. He was met by the chief officers of the division, with whom he talked and inspected the work that was being carried on in the construction of a new mountain road up the slopes of Cornosega. This road was cut sheer out of the face of the precipitous rock. In places it was twenty feet wide, and the surface excellent. At certain points the rock overhung the road, which was nothing more or less than a huge notch drilled out of the wall of the mountain. This was, in fact, one of the most magnificent feats of engineering that I saw while in Italy. At the lower altitudes, where the road had to be made out of semi-earth and semi-rock soil, hundreds of civilians, old men and young boys, were employed both in rock-drilling and road-making. Further up,

all the work was carried on by the military engineers. It was to the scene of similar undertakings that the King of Italy would pay a surprise visit. From where no one knew, he suddenly appeared without giving any warning of his approach, and without the least ceremony. No monarch could have led a life more devoted to the cause for which his country was fighting. It was a well-known fact that he had not left the war zone for twelve months, that he rose from his bed daily at 5 a.m., that he was out by 6 in his motor to visit some part of the front: that he refused every offer of hospitality or entertainment, no matter from whom it came: at midday he would stop by the roadside and eat his picnic lunch like any ordinary traveller. By 3.30 he would be back at his headquarters to attend for the rest of the day to his papers and business. He did not return to Rome until after the armistice was signed. By untiring and uninterrupted devotion to work, he thus set a stirring

example to every officer and man in his Army.

On Saturday, 25th May, as a welcome change to my almost daily visits to the mountains, I started at 6.15 a.m. in a fast-running Lancia car to attend a conference at Verona. My companions were my French colleague, Gillard, and two or three Italian staff officers. The conference was really a lecture by one Colonel Faury, a French staff officer, given to the Allied officers assembled at the Town Hall, Verona, at what was called the Cours d'Information. These courses were organised by the French, and staffed specially from France. They were held principally for the benefit of Italian officers, so that they might learn the latest methods employed on the French front, hear the latest authentic news of fighting, and learn the lessons derived from the recent battles in France and Flanders.

For this purpose one of the lecturers made periodical visits to France of about a week's duration, and came back with the

latest information, at any rate from the French point of view. All officers who attended the courses, from generals downwards, were the guests of the French Government, and the whole scheme was very well organised. Everyone enjoyed these courses, and looked on them as a rest from the humdrum monotony of life in the line. Not a few of the Italians, however, felt bound to swallow some of the lectures with a grain of salt, observing that the French point of view was put forward sometimes perhaps too prominently, that the French did not realise the difference between warfare on the French front, in Champagne or in Flanders, and warfare in the mountains of Italy. The French, they said, were inclined to lay down the law about stereotyped methods, as if, because they were successful in France, they must also succeed in Italy, if they were properly adopted. They certainly preached adoption—and not adaptation. However, the Italians have a great sense of humour, and

preferred to listen and smile rather than allow themselves to become annoyed at the implications and suggestions contained in these lectures.

The particular lecture which we heard on this day was the story of the fighting round Amiens from the beginning of the German offensive of March 1918 onwards, and was of extreme interest. It was of the greatest value hearing first-hand news of what happened during those anxious days in France, especially to those of us who had been on the French front, and had, during the period covered by the lecture, been limited for sources of information to the curt official bulletins and the very unofficial news in the press. After the lecture we strolled round Verona, seeing some of the chief features of interest, and motored back to our own headquarters in the evening.

PART II
THE TWO OFFENSIVES

THE TWO OFFENSIVES

TOWARDS the end of May I paid several visits to different parts of the line in order to observe to what extent the Italians were prepared for the almost certain prospect of an Austrian offensive. Apart from visits to the front line, I was also taken to see battery positions and heavy trench mortars. On the 26th I went on to the Piave front near Nervesa, and amongst other things came across two newly arrived 305-mm. howitzers. Later in the day we paid an interesting visit to a battery of 240-mm. trench mortars. There was, in fact, every evidence of the arrival during this period of a great quantity of artillery of all calibres. The defence schemes of all units in the line were complete, and there was a fixed determination on the part of all that even the most gigantic effort

that was expected of the enemy would meet with failure and defeat. During the first few days of June frequent rumours were circulated as to the exact date and locality of the enemy's attack. Every other day, approximately, a prisoner or deserter was brought in who confirmed the fact of its imminence. Everybody was becoming highly strung: we were all hoping that it would begin soon; the suspense was very trying, though the ultimate result was assured. An extraordinary feature of the ten days preceding the attack was the absolute lack of visible movement or activity of any sort on the part of the Austrians. I began to think that the whole thing was bluff, though as a matter of fact the intelligence we received made such a hypothesis well-nigh impossible. We had but to wait and be prepared.

On the day before the offensive was launched I was walking in the line with Sagna and Gillard, at the bottom of the Val Brenta. We had an interesting walk

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ITALIAN 305-MM. HOWITZER.

through Valstagna, and along the valley into the line at Rivalta. The water of the Brenta shone a deep blue ; the precipitous sides of the valley, covered with pines and mountain shrubs, loomed dark and awe-inspiring ; the entire absence of any warlike activity banished from our minds any thoughts of the likelihood of an early Austrian offensive.

It came, however, and within twenty-four hours. Very early on the morning of the 15th June the bombardment commenced along a front of over one hundred and fifty kilometres, and at about 6.30 the various attacks began to develop.

I will not attempt here to tell in detail the story of the battle that raged for the next ten days along practically the whole front.

As is well known, the British and French on the Asiago Plateau re-established their line by the evening of the first day, and the Austrian effort on this part of the front was completely defeated. On the 4th Army front, between the Brenta and the Piave,

they met with very little more success. By dint of infiltration, and favoured by the fog, the Austrians gained possession of Col Moschin very early in the day, and even reached the chapel of San Giovanni, a mile further south. Had they remained on this position they would have severely threatened the Italian line of communication up the Grappa road. On the evening of the 15th, however, after the situation had been somewhat doubtful all day, the 9th Corps sent up a fresh battalion of Arditi or assault troops to clear up the situation. After the artillery on the right bank of the Brenta had directed a heavy concentration of fire upon it, this battalion recaptured the Col Moschin, taking a large number of prisoners and re-establishing the position.

There certainly could be no finer troops than these Arditi, of whom there was afterwards formed a complete army corps. Though the principle is perhaps a wrong one if carried to extremes, admirable work was done by the assault battalions on this

front. All volunteers, officers and men, trained to the highest degree of efficiency, and selected as a result of severe physical tests, they never failed to carry an objective. It is no wonder they were a terror to the Austrian. They were frightening men to look at even at ordinary times. Each man carried a dagger and bombs. In appearance they were of the cut-throat type, wearing low-neck tunics and scarves round their throats. No mercy was shown to the Austrian, and they rarely took a prisoner. If they were ordered to do so for purposes of examination, it was with the greatest difficulty that their officers were able to get the order carried out.

On the rest of the Army front, except for an unimportant retirement from the Pertica position, the situation remained unchanged. In fact, it was obvious after the first twenty-four hours that the attack in the mountains had failed, and victory lay with the Allies. If the Austrian wished for success, he would have to push on the Piave, and this he did

with all his available strength during the week following the initial attack.

He had succeeded, under cover of the fog and a very heavy, though scattered bombardment, in forcing the Piave at several points. On the first day, however, the Veneto Brigade, of which I knew so many officers and men, behaved with the utmost gallantry. Mustering their own reserves, they delivered a prompt counter-attack on their front in the neighbourhood of Palazzon, and completely routed the Austrian, inflicting heavy casualties and capturing fifteen hundred prisoners.

There remained, in fact, two dangerous bridgeheads in possession of the Austrian, and these he endeavoured to enlarge by rushing troops over from the left bank of the Piave. One of these was on the Montello, which he had succeeded in attaining at crossings between Casa de Faveri and Villa Jacur, at the apex of the Italian salient at this point. For three days he continued to make progress, though he never reached

a depth of more than four miles, and this only by hard fighting. There was never anything in the nature of a gap in the Italian line. The difficulty and danger was that the Italians were, during the first four days of the battle, fully employed all along the line, and lacked sufficient reserves to concentrate in large numbers at any given point. Furthermore, after four days' fighting the troops in the line were tired, while the Austrians kept on reinforcing their attacking divisions.

At its worst, the Montello salient stretched from the Ponte della Priula along the railway to Sovilla, thence south-east of Giavara, thence practically due west to the road south of Casa Marseille, and then north to the river bank. On to this small area they had passed over the river no less than six divisions.

The second Austrian bridgehead was on the Lower Piave, and was somewhat deeper. It stretched from Musile to within a mile of Meolo, then practically due north to Fagare

and Saletto. In the first two days of the fight the five Italian divisions in this area, between Nervesa and the sea, were attacked by eleven Austrian divisions, and these were rapidly reinforced by five more.

The two bridgeheads were in the territory of the 3rd and 8th Italian Armies, and after the first two days the Austrians concentrated all their efforts against the Italians at these points. As soon as this became evident the Italians began to reinforce their divisions in the line from reserves held at other points on the front, and from divisions holding quiet sectors. In this task they were able to use to the best advantage their magnificent system of roads and motor transport. In one case a division holding a sector in the Stelvio, east of Lake Garda, up in the mountains, was transferred to the Lower Piave front, a distance over three hundred miles, in forty hours, including the relief. The motor transport drivers worked night and day for nearly a week, and the number of lorries that broke down was infinitesimal. I saw one or two

ditched by the roadside, but, taking into account the amount of travelling by road that I myself had to do during that exciting week, the total must have been less than one-quarter per cent. I spent my time motoring round visiting the various headquarters, gathering news of recent events and of plans for the future, and making expeditions to divisions in the line. The spirit of the troops was at all times excellent. I did see instances of lack of control on the part of the higher commands, and it was difficult on occasions to arrive at a correct estimate of the actual situation at a given moment.

Several counter-attacks were made by the Italians on a very large scale, but no real progress was made, owing to lack of detailed organisation and sufficiently precise artillery preparation. They then decided to attempt to achieve their object by sustaining continued pressure on the Austrians, and at the same time by destroying and keeping destroyed all the pontoon and foot bridges

over the Piave, to make life impossible for the Austrian troops on the right bank.

For this purpose the Italian artillery was divided into the necessary groups, and the aid of British Air Force squadrons was invoked to help bomb the bridges. This united effort bore fruit in a very short time, and on the night of the 23rd June rumour had it that the Austrians were commencing to retire. Aeroplanes had reported that the Austrian bridges had been broken for twenty out of the previous twenty-four hours. It was probable, therefore, that they would be unable to munition and feed the divisions that they had pushed across the Piave. It was impossible for them also to bring artillery on to the Montello, so that the maintenance of their forces or any further advance by them was impossible so long as we continued to pump lead on to their bridges. A general advance was ordered by the Italians on the morning of the 24th, when it was found that, but for rearguards consisting of stubborn groups of machine-

gunners, the bulk of the Austrian forces had retreated over the Piave. By the evening the whole right bank was clear, thousands of prisoners had been captured, and the line was entirely re-established.

The Italian troops rose to the occasion magnificently, and exploited their successes right up to the river bank. On the evening of the 24th attempts were made by them to cross the Piave, as it was rumoured that the Austrians were retiring possibly even further than the left bank. The Italian patrols, however, met with stubborn resistance and were unable to effect a crossing which could prove of any use. Their Army was tired : their losses had been severe. Their artillery, distributed for defensive tactics, was not near enough to the river to give proper support to an immediate offensive. Though the spirit of the troops was naturally at its highest, and their zeal to follow up the Austrian to the Tagliamento generally kindled, the higher command were of opinion that it was beyond human possi-

bility to exploit their victory to any useful degree with the means at their disposal ; they therefore gave the order to remain on their old positions, to consolidate them, and to rest.

This in a few words is the story of the greatest effort that the Austrian Army had ever made to overthrow Italy's armed forces and overrun the country. Captured orders revealed the most interesting details. They showed in the first place that the Austrians expected a repetition of Caporetto, and that the Italian line would crumple like paper. The first day's objective of the Austrian forces on the Piave was Treviso, for the second day Mestre, for the third Padova. The operation, gigantic as it was, had avowedly been prepared for months, with the greatest attention to detail. Every officer and non-commissioned officer had in his possession large-scale maps showing the exact route by which he and his small group of men were to proceed, what they would meet, and where they were to concentrate for their

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PAPER CURRENCY SUPPLIED TO AUSTRIAN SOLDIERS.

next move. Maps were also issued showing a complete list of the positions of all Italian headquarters, the names of the Italian brigades that would be encountered at different points, and the Austrian opinion of their quality. Every possible detail was worked out as to their conduct when once they had broken through. Soldiers were even supplied with the paper currency with which to purchase their requirements in the occupied regions. Whether the Austrian high command really expected such an easy success as their orders implied, will probably never be known. Their orders, however, circulated to all ranks, were launched in terms of absolute confidence in their own superiority and immediate success.

It is true that they had an enormous concentration and superiority in number of artillery of all calibres : it is true also that they had a vast superiority in infantry divisions, at any rate in the initial stages of the attack. It appears also that they

were equally confident of the results of their propaganda, and were certain that the morale of the Italians was at a very low ebb.

Here, however, they made one of those great and characteristically Hun mistakes. The Austrian had misjudged the Italian nation, just as his greater ally had misjudged the French. He did not realise that the soul of Italy had been awakened by the disaster of Caporetto. He did not realise that whatever elements of apathy towards the war, whatever feelings of disunion, pro-Boche sympathy, or faint-heartedness that may have existed in the autumn of 1917, these had been wiped out or rendered powerless by midsummer 1918. When the Italians saw the real meaning of German-born propaganda, when they had experienced the brutalities of German occupation, when they perceived that the German and Austrian meant to overrun and ruin their country, when they had had practical experience of their ruthless policy of destruction—

from that moment the Austrian cause was lost. Italy was aroused. Ashamed before the world at such a ghastly stain on her national history and character, she felt bound to vindicate herself. The Italians realised with all true friends of Italy that the events of October 1917 were not a typical or true chapter in the history of Italy. It was a stain, a terrible, irrefutable stain. But it had to be wiped out. It had to be vindicated. Thus to some extent the disaster of Caporetto saved Italy. It strengthened the war party to real determination. It rallied the slackers and the apathetic: it weakened irretrievably the pro-German elements in the interior, and increased the distrust in the political influence of the Papacy: consequently it lightened enormously the heavy burden of internal intrigue against which the Italian patriots had to fight: it relieved them of anxiety to an extent which no one outside Italy realised.

Once that portion of the Italian people

who were susceptible to this influence had been brought to their senses about the real meaning of this internal propaganda, and had realised its existence, half the battle was won: ultimate victory was assured. Furthermore, the appearance of the Allies on the Italian front had borne excellent fruit. Apart from the increased confidence which it gave them, the Italians undoubtedly profited to a large extent by their propinquity. In countless small ways, and in some more important spheres, they had been brought right up to date in modern methods of warfare, and had derived great benefit from learning in their quick and intelligent way the lessons taught by bitter experience of the Allies on the French front. The Austrian knew this and was afraid of it. He never ceased to strew leaflets all over the north of Italy reviling the Allies, especially the British, imputing to us all kinds of designs for territorial aggrandisement, and the desire to enslave Italy. His efforts were laughable—so bombastic, and yet so blatantly shallow.

He seemed confident, however, that they would succeed in their object.

In one other respect also he failed to interpret the Italian national character, and in this he may not have been alone. Very few casual observers realise to what extent the Italians, during the six months following Caporetto, demonstrated their resiliency and their power of recuperation.

Within two months they had a complete network of defence lines and wire entanglements which were the object of amazement of British and French staff officers who visited them. But for adverse weather conditions, they would have resumed the offensive on a fairly large scale within three months. Within six months the Italians, after suffering the loss of a quarter of a million men, four thousand guns, and a great quantity of war material, now had more men under arms than ever before, a stronger artillery than ever before, and had recouped their other resources. This in a country absolutely devoid of raw material, with

comparatively small manufacturing plant, and extremely short of food. A great achievement, accomplished, it is true, by the aid of generous and spontaneous help from the Allies, but accomplished, nevertheless, by sheer determination and will-power.

The battle of the Piave constituted practically a double victory, won decisively in nine days. In all the German offensives in France, the Allies had been forced to yield at the least several miles before stemming the German onslaught. In Italy, however, the Austrian nowhere progressed more than six miles. It is true, and must be admitted, that he had the river to cross and the crossings to maintain. But he had made what he thought adequate provision and calculation to meet this case. In spite of repeated attacks with fresh troops against the tired Italian divisions, he was unable to break their line, or progress at any point more than three miles in one day. This in itself constituted a great victory. Furthermore, although the Italian staff showed

themselves as lacking the power to organise counter-attacks rapidly on a large scale, and failed to apply in the short space of time allowed them in cases of urgency the amount of detailed calculation essential to success, the Italian Army, by sustaining pressure on the Austrian bridgeheads, by concentrating continuous and accurate artillery fire on the bridges and lines of communication, and by systematically bombing all the approaches to the Austrian positions, forced them to retire and thereby won a second and decisive victory. Italy had every reason to be proud: had every reason to praise the bravery and powers of endurance of her soldiers. Within nine days of the Austrians launching their greatest offensive, Caporetto had been doubly avenged.

With the end of this battle came the end of my first period in Italy. Much pleased at the favourable turn of events, and with my varied and interesting experiences, I entrained at Padova on the 27th June for

England, for my first leave to England for more than nine months.

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On my return I found the situation re-established and quiet all along the line. The Italians were thrilled with the news of General Mangin's great victory in France, and hoped in a short time to set the ball rolling in Italy. Throughout the next six weeks I met a number of officers in the line chafing at their forced inactivity, asking why they were compelled to remain on the positions they had occupied for so many months, while the Allies were advancing by leaps and bounds on the French front. They stated that they were confident in the ability of their troops to break through the Austrian line, and were certain that the morale of the Austrian Army was at its lowest ebb. We knew that the condition of things in the interior of Austria was disquieting to the Austrian rulers: that the spirit of the Army was only maintained by

rigorous censorship, by depriving the population of the country of food and necessaries in order to provide for the needs of their soldiers, and by long-standing and old-established discipline. The vast heterogeneous mass of uneducated soldiers of which the Imperial Army was composed were only held together by an almost innate sense of discipline. More animal than human, prisoners were often met with, unable to express their opinions or thoughts, or to remember where they had been, and in many cases unable to state the names of their own officers or the number of their own battalion.

The Italian higher command, however, appeared to lack confidence. They realised, I think, that their offensive-defensive operations in the battles of the Piave and Montello had been a failure, and that their losses had been unnecessarily heavy. They may have realised the reason for this, and the way to remedy it; but they lacked confidence in their capacity to organise and direct an

offensive which would have sufficiently far-reaching results to make the game worth the candle. Italy was suffering very intimately and acutely from the war, and the military authorities would not risk the possibility of failure. They were of opinion that they lacked reserves of men and material. They practically decided to wait till the spring, when they hoped to have an unlimited quantity of both.

The new 1900 class would be in the line, some four hundred thousand young men ; arrangements were being made for the construction of hundreds of tanks to take part in the spring offensive, and for the development of a very large mobile force of aeroplanes, motor cannon, and such-like machinery with which to follow up the retreating enemy. It may be that the Italian high command were being too cautious ; it may be that they underestimated the value of their own troops, and overestimated the power of resistance of the Austrians. They had proof every day

in raids of the stubborn qualities of the Austrian soldier. This, on the other hand, may have been experienced through incomplete organisation of raids. They may have been acting under orders from Paris. It is not for me to say. The fact remains that up till the first week of October, in spite of the restive and impatient attitude which existed amongst the troops in the line, those that directed their operations decided in favour of waiting.

For the next six weeks I resumed my excursions to different parts of the line and had some very profitable days.

I paid yet another visit to the French Cours d'Information at Verona, where I attended two lectures on fighting on the French front given by Colonel Faury, and met several interesting and amusing French officers. On the 8th of August I had a long and pleasant walk on the Montello with Colonel Carletti, my old friend of the 8th Corps, who was now on the staff of the 8th Army, serving under his old com-

mander, General Caviglia. The Montello was in full bloom, and there were luckily few traces, except at certain points, of the recent hard fighting, the reason for this being that there had been very little shell-fire. I lunched afterwards with the Army commander, who had made further progress in the English language.

On the 14th August I had an instructive excursion, but finished the day badly. I was fated to experience more motor accidents than anyone I came across or heard of, and this one was very nearly my last. I hope now that it will be.

I started from Army Headquarters at 7 a.m., reaching Possagno at 8. Thence I took the *teleferica* to the summit of Monte Pallone. I had grown fairly accustomed to this mode of transport, but I confess that I hated the experience of stopping in mid-air. On this occasion the cage stopped for some reason twice on the way up, leaving me to meditate on the cause of the trouble. I had visions of the motor which

should be propelling me upwards breaking down so severely under my weight that a long time would be necessary to effect the repairs, during the whole of which time I would have to remain in my iron basket, hanging in the air with a drop of some fifteen hundred feet below me. What of my prospects, too, if the Austrian began shelling and broke the rope? This had happened on some occasions, and he had lately been paying frequent attention to *teleferica*, though not generally so early in the morning. However, after I had passed some very unpleasant moments, the car resumed motion and I was conveyed to my destination.

I had an exciting but highly profitable walk to Monte Medata to inspect the exact positions held by the Italians and Austrians on the Spinoncia, and returned after three hours in the heat of the sun to lunch with my kind friend, General Bencivenga. Afterwards I set off to walk to Monte Pallone, where I hoped to find De Robilant, to present

him with some of my tobacco. I found, however, that his battalion had been relieved during the preceding night. By this time I was hot and tired; having walked for over five hours, I resolved to complete the journey by trusting myself once more to a *teleferica*, at the halfway station of which I found myself about 5 p.m. To my disgust and annoyance, this one also stopped no less than five times on its journey. During the last halt I had the unpleasant experience of having to submit to the firing of salvoes from a howitzer battery some three hundred feet below me. Never was I more glad to reach *terra firma* and depart in peace in my car. However, I had not finished with the day's adventures. I do not remember the incident very clearly, but about half way home, at the crossing of two highroads, an Italian light lorry with three men on the front seat, talking hard as they drove along at a very fast speed, collided with my car as we were passing the cross-roads. Had my English chauffeur been driving quicker

I should have probably escaped. He was, however, taking precautions, and the lorry hit the off hind wheel of my car with terrific force, hurling the car to the left-hand side of the road and throwing me out. The road was bounded as usual by trees bordering the dykes on each side of it. I missed the trees and landed head downwards in the ditch, where I lay senseless until picked up. The car luckily hit the tree I missed, which prevented it following me into the ditch. The chauffeur was only shaken, but the differential of the car was damaged, and it refused to move. After three minutes or so, I believe, I came to my senses and was taken home in a concussed condition to the Army Headquarters, some three miles distant, in the lorry that had run into me. My hosts could not have been kinder to me. I retired to bed, where the doctor applied ice to my head for the night, and I remained resting in my cool and comfortable room during the next few days. When I was able to get about again the medical officer forbade

me to resume my expeditions into the mountains for a few days, so I seized the opportunity of asking my chiefs at the British Headquarters to allow me to go away for five days.

I left that night *via* Florence for Castiglioncello, a charming seaside place a few miles south of Livorno. I stayed in a villa here for four days, enjoying complete rest and comfort in the most wonderful surroundings. The village was composed of a few groups of villas perched on the rocks like dolls' houses. The villa itself was within thirty yards of the sea, beautifully situated in a small bay, with a garden running down to the seashore. Here, within fifty yards of the Mediterranean, grew peaches and grapes and an abundance of vegetables. The seawater was hot, and clear as crystal, and the bottom was visible to a depth of thirty feet.

A more delightful place one could not wish for. In spite of the hot sun, a cooling breeze blew throughout the day: the evenings were more than restful, spent on the

verandah, watching the deep blue sky and sea grow red in the setting sun, and then blue again as darkness came on and the stars glittered in the sky. The sight was thrilling in its magnificence. At night the soft murmur of the sea and the faint rippling breeze sent one to sleep at peace with the world.

After four days in this environment I returned to my work completely recovered, though I was advised to take things gradually. I therefore refrained for a few days from making long expeditions in the heat of the day. It was about this time, on 29th August, that I took a party of Italians to our G.H.Q. school of instruction, where we inspected the various classes performing their everyday labours. We were all much interested in a class of Italian N.C.O.'s under instruction in bayonet fighting at the hands of a British instructor. The Italians were fascinated, too, by the pipers of the 2nd Gordons, who were playing in the courtyard of the convent which served as the head-

quarters of the school. My friends were genuinely struck with the efficiency of our methods of training, and if the war had gone on, these visits would have borne considerable fruit. Even as it was, a great deal had been done. Large numbers of Italian officers and N.C.O.'s had attended courses at the British schools, and all spoke of them in the most favourable terms. During the summer a complete Italian division went through a course of instruction in the British training area.

While I was on leave in England the Italian 3rd Army had carried out the operation which they had planned much earlier in the year, and about which I have already spoken, that is, the capture of all the ground between the Old and the New Piave. They did this by a series of small operations systematically prepared, and by sustaining continuous pressure on the Austrian garrisons. The nature of the ground was such that once they had lost their front line they had to go back to the northern side of the New

Piave. The marshes and lagoons, intersected by roads built on dykes, forbade the construction of any real intervening lines of defence between the Old and the New Piave, and the conquest of this territory was merely a matter of time. Its acquisition, too, did much to relieve Venice, as the line was advanced some five miles. Venice was, in fact, "complètement dégagée."

On Saturday, 3rd July, I went down to this sector with Luraschi, of the 3rd Army. I left at 6.15 for this Army Headquarters, witnessing a beautiful sunrise, and embarked on a launch at San Giuliano, near Mestre. Travelling along the Grand Canal on this brilliantly clear summer morning, we crossed the lagoons and arrived at Cavazuccherina about 10. Thence straight to the line by motor car and bicycle. Afterwards we lunched at Cavazuccherina, at the headquarters of the Granatieri Brigade. I found the General and many officers and men suffering a great deal from malaria. We

spent a short time in Venice on the return journey, and arrived at Army Headquarters at Mogliano in time for dinner. Back at 11 p.m.

On Tuesday, 3rd September, I took a party of Italian friends over to Trissino to the 23rd British Divisional horse-show. An excellent show, well organised and held in the most beautiful surroundings. The huge field in which the show took place formed a natural arena, surrounded by low hills, on one of which was perched the picturesque village of Trissino. The Italians were delighted with their afternoon, admired the quality and performances of our horses, and were astonished at the excellence of our equipment and organisation.

The same sentiments were expressed with still greater conviction a few days later, when I took a party of officers of the Firenze Lancers to inspect the British Corps Cavalry Regiment. The visit was prearranged, and the second in command provided a very comprehensive show and an excellent lunch

for his visitors. We inspected the limber teams, hotchkiss-gun teams, heavy draught horses, and officers' chargers, which were first-class. We visited midday stables (to the sound of much wisping !), the men's billets, saddlery, and equipment, with all of which my friends were quite rightly delighted. They expressed the greatest admiration, and paid the officers concerned very high compliments. It was pleasing to hear such words of genuine appreciation from Allied cavalry officers of high standing and long service.

I paid a visit two days afterwards to a great friend then holding the line on Monte Pallone—Casati, an excellent fellow and a fine commanding officer of a battalion of the Ravenna Brigade. Formerly a cavalry soldier who had been and is again Master of Hounds in the Campagna Romana, he had transferred to the infantry during the war, and had recently won the silver medal for valour. I visited his line and had a long talk with him, during which he spoke to me of

the difficulties that he had to contend with. He spoke quite frankly of the trouble experienced by so many battalion commanders through the deterioration in the type of young regimental officer—of how difficult it was to instil into them a sense of responsibility, and of it being impossible to rely on orders being carried out. He envied the British nation, he said, who had large classes to draw from which did not exist in Italy. He spoke of the difficulty of replacing the enormous casualties in officers which the Italians had experienced in the early days of the war. He told me, as many others had told me, how the lives of every officer in battalion after battalion were recklessly sacrificed in the most gallant and useless attempts to cut through the Austrian wire entanglements with pincers, only to be swept down in waves by Austrian machine-gun fire. It was an undoubted fact that the flower of the Italian Army had thus perished to no purpose. Few people outside Italy realise the frame of mind in which Italy

started the war. They went out as if to fight a crusade. They attacked with their generals and their colours at their head. During the first winter in the mountains the whole Army remained in the open always. There was no shelter for officers or men ; no provision was made for stationary warfare ; and they had to wait months for material. It was almost mediæval, their method of fighting : gallantry and enthusiasm there was, plenty ; but it was not modern warfare. It was a marvel that they survived it. They did, but at what a cost !

About the middle of September I was ordered to proceed to the headquarters of one of the British divisions holding a sector of the line on the Asiago Plateau. I was to be attached to their headquarters for a month, for the purpose of gaining further experience. I was replaced at 4th Army Headquarters by Major Lowe, a staff officer from France ; gathering together my goods and chattels I left the Italian Army for a month's stay in the mountains.

This month proved to be a most enjoyable change. I lived at a height of over three thousand feet, in a hut lit by electric light, and surrounded by thick pine-woods in which grew an abundance of undergrowth and wild flowers. It was extremely interesting working with British troops on this front and observing the difference in their organisation and methods from those of the Italians. We also lay alongside a French division holding the sector on our right, and an Italian division on our left. All these were naturally intermingled in the back areas, and it was a novel sight and an interesting one to see soldiers of the Allied nations associating with each other during periods of rest.

The arrangements for amusing the troops out of the line were noticeably good. They had an excellent football ground, situated on a plateau formed by a natural cup in the mountains just south of Osteria di Granezza, and there was a first-rate divisional theatre. The latest films were shown on the cine-

matograph, and an almost professional troupe gave entertainments and revues, with a fresh programme every week. All this within four miles of the front line, within range of the Austrian artillery. The performances were never interrupted; sometimes we heard stray shells whizzing over our heads as we sat watching the capers of Charlie Chaplin or the dramas of Mary Pickford.

During the month which I was attached to them, the division undertook some very successful raids, with or without the co-operation of the French, and on several occasions we were met at breakfast-time by the sight of two hundred or more Austrian prisoners huddled together on the grass outside Divisional Headquarters waiting for cross-examination and dispatch to the plains.

Towards the beginning of October much news came in concerning the unstable condition of affairs in Austria, of the approach of a revolution, and of demands for an armistice. Everyone hoped that the Italians

would not wait too long, and would take advantage of the discipline that still remained amongst the Austrian soldiers to win from them a decisive military victory.

At the beginning of October I learnt that plans were, in fact, being prepared for a large offensive operation, and on the 15th I was ordered once more to return to the Italians—not, however, to the Army to which I was attached before, but to the 8th Italian Army, holding the Montello sector, with headquarters near Castelfranco.

Thither I repaired on the 16th, meeting many officers whom I knew, and was welcomed very kindly at headquarters. Champagne and speeches the first night—all very emotional.

During the next few days I was to learn all details of the prospective operations which were to be carried out under the direction of General Caviglia, commanding the Army group consisting of the 8th (Italian), 10th (British), and 12th (French) Armies, in all of which, however, there were also Italian

troops. For many days the operations had to be postponed owing to atrocious weather and the large amount of water in the Piave. The river in some places was very rapid, and rose and fell several inches in the space of two or three hours. The story of the battle is public property, at any rate as far as the British were concerned, but it would perhaps be interesting to give a short outline of events.

The general objective was Vittorio, and it is doubtful if the Italian high command expected any greater results than the attainment of this line. At any rate, they were not prepared for it. The 4th Army was to make very strong demonstrations along the whole front. The 12th Army, under the French General, Graziani, was to force the crossings of the Piave at Pederobba and on the left of the Montello. The 8th Army, under Caviglia, was to cross the river at the northern point of the Montello, and at the Ponte della Priula; the 10th Army, under the command of Lord Cavan, were to form a bridgehead opposite the Grave

di Papadopoli. All these bridgeheads were afterwards to be united, and the troops to push northwards to Vittorio.

On the night of the 26th the bombardment commenced, under cover of which the bridging operations were carried out. Early on the morning of the 27th troops began moving across at all points except at the Ponte della Priula, and bridgeheads were formed in spite of the enemy's stubborn resistance.

Unfortunately, the force of the current and heavy shell-fire washed away or destroyed all the bridges by 9 a.m. on the 27th, and it became impossible to reinforce the units that had crossed on to the opposite bank. In spite of this delay, and in the face of very strong opposition, the British bridgehead was secured and enlarged, Italian troops working in co-operation with the British divisions. The 8th and 12th Armies held bridgeheads, but were unable to progress or keep up communication with the southern bank, and on the 28th the position did not

look too favourable. The 8th Italian Corps had made several unsuccessful attempts to bridge the river at the Ponte della Priula, and it was impossible for Lord Cavan to advance further north, leaving his left flank exposed. At his instigation, however, the Army group commander allotted to him the 18th Italian Corps, with which he promised to push north-west along the river and then towards Conegliano. He would thus be exerting pressure on the rear of the Austrian positions opposing the 8th and 12th Army bridgeheads, forcing the Austrians to retire, and thereby enabling the French and Italian bridgeheads, as well as the British, to be enlarged and united. This corps, under General de Basso, consisted of the Como, Bisagno, Ravenna, and Sassari Brigades, all good and tried troops. Working with both their infantry and artillery under British control, they fought a magnificent action, capturing, in conjunction with British battalions on their right, all their objectives within the scheduled time. They achieved

this in spite of heavy hostile bombing from aeroplanes, and in spite of being unable, owing to congestion of traffic on the bridges, to bring up their reserves to their proper jumping-off place in time for the attack. Throughout the time that this corps was under the tactical control of the British, they showed the utmost gallantry and push, and Lord Cavan on several occasions expressed his admiration of their behaviour, the good and concise orders of their commander, his power and will to exploit a success, and the speed at which he pursued the retreating enemy.

This operation was the turning-point of the battle. If the reader will glance at the map he will be able easily to appreciate the position.

On the 28th the bridgeheads of the 12th and 8th Armies ran as follows :—12th Army, Osteria west of Vidor—north of San Giovanni to Monte Settolo. The 8th Army bridgeheads from north of Falze di Piave through Sernaglia, Moriago, to Bosco. To

the north of the Austrian positions the ground rises gradually up to Monte Cesen, and any rapid line of retreat to the north was impossible. It follows, therefore, that any undue pressure westwards from the left flank of the British bridgehead, which ran south-west from Borgo Melanotte, would make the retirement of the enemy in front of the other two bridgeheads inevitable, and the longer it was postponed the more precipitate would it be. In point of fact, when the 10th Army bridgehead had been enlarged on its left flank up to and beyond the railway line north of the Ponte della Priula, the Austrian pressure on the other two bridgeheads broke suddenly. The battle was converted rapidly into a pursuit, and the enemy's retreat turned as rapidly into a rout.

After the 30th progress was practically uninterrupted, and every day afterwards accelerated in speed.

Once the 12th Army had gained freedom of movement they pushed northwards towards Feltre, and it became evident that

the nearer they reached this objective the more precarious became the position of the Austrian forces on the Grappa front, as one of their two lines of communication was being rapidly cut. On the 31st, in fact, the enemy broke also on this front, and the 4th Army, which had hitherto been held up by the most obstinate resistance, and had been engaged in furious hand-to-hand fighting, now found that it had captured practically all the Austrian artillery on the Army front, and most of the infantry. This Austrian army had waited too long and was caught in a trap. Very soon after, the same situation developed on the right bank of the Brenta, where, on account of the advance of the 4th Army on to Primolano and Grigno, the Austrian communications behind Asiago were severed. By the 31st of the month the whole Austrian Army was in headlong flight.

On the afternoon of the 31st I set off with a friend from the 8th Army to attempt to cross the river by the pontoon

bridge at Vidor. We found the stream running very rapidly even then, and realised the difficulty the *pontonieri* must have had in constructing and maintaining the bridges at the beginning of the battle. We were also able to judge the effect of the artillery fire during the preliminary bombardment. The roads were in an appalling condition, full of holes, and in some places a sea of mud. We did not get very far on this account, but we saw some very interesting sights. Columns of mule transport laden with rations and ammunition were threading their way along the lanes, endeavouring to reach their units, which were already miles ahead. Occasionally we came across old men or women rummaging about the ruins of their houses, attempting to collect any belongings that remained to them. Most of them had been in the area during the Hun occupation. They were thin, ill-fed, and had a hunted look in their eyes. Small groups of civilians were arriving from further north to see if their houses were still standing,

and stood by the side of the road welcoming the columns of advancing troops. From one of these groups standing in a village street, as we passed slowly along in the car, a young girl, smiling broadly in her joy at being once more set free, called out to us, with apparent sincerity, "Cari, come siete belli!" We were much embarrassed.

We managed, after waiting nearly an hour, to get back across the river just before dark. The congestion at all the pontoon bridges was very great, and the Italians as usual failed completely in their solution of the traffic problem.

On returning to Army Headquarters I found an order awaiting me to proceed "forthwith" to join the 18th Italian Corps, which was operating under the 10th (British) Army. The reason for my transfer was that henceforward the direction of march of the 8th Army was northwards towards Feltre, and that of the British 10th Army eastwards to the river Tagliamento. There was therefore no further necessity for a

British liaison officer to be employed with the 8th Army.

Early on the morning of the 1st November left 8th Army Headquarters to cross the pontoon bridge at the Ponte della Priula. A column of three or four vehicles abreast stretched from the bridge to about two miles south of Spresiano. Some of these vehicles had been there all night, waiting for their turn to cross the bridge. The traffic arrangements were execrable: here were hundreds of motor lorries containing field-guns, stores, rations, and ammunition held up for hours through bad traffic organisation, while the progress of the fighting troops north of the river was naturally delayed by their non-arrival. I gave up the attempt to cross at this point, as I should probably have had to wait all day. The bridges, it was said, could only be crossed by one vehicle at a time, and at walking pace. It seemed curious that this defect could not have been remedied, or in any case, that the traffic was not regulated

so as to ensure a steady flow in each direction. The lorries belonging to the column proceeding north wedged themselves into every available gap, blocking up the road. This prevented the traffic going south, away from the bridges, from moving at all, and the result was unutterable chaos.

I drove up to Nervesa, where, to my surprise, I found a pontoon bridge perfectly clear. I wondered why some of the traffic had not been diverted to this bridge, but for my own purposes I was pleased that it had not. I reached Conegliano, the Corps Headquarters, at midday. At lunch I heard that the officers' mess cook was cooking in the same kitchen as he had cooked as a civilian before the war, as chef to the owner of the ruined villa in which our Headquarters were lodged.

On the morning of the 2nd November we moved up to Polcenigo after a long, slow drive. The roads were in an extremely bad state. They had not been repaired for months, and the iron wheels of the Austrian

lorries had caused the road surface to resemble the "Witching Waves" at Earl's Court Exhibition. The country was denuded of all vegetation, and every house in most of the villages had been emptied of furniture, windows and doors. Some of the inhabitants were pathetic to look upon, but were delighted to see the Italians. As we travelled further away from what was the front line, the villages appeared less naked, and in the districts used as rest billets and back areas by the Austrians, they were intact and full of inhabitants. We arrived about midday at Polcenigo, a prettily situated old town with narrow streets and overhanging houses; towering up above us on a thickly wooded hill was the ruin of the old castle of the Conti di Polcenigo. A torrent ran through the centre of the town, which was surrounded by hills and woods, shining in the sunlight. The tops of the hills seemed almost at arm's length, so clear and limpid was the atmosphere. In the afternoon we strolled about the town while a continuous stream of

lorries of every description poured down the chief street, on towards the Tagliamento.

The next day, the 3rd, was a day without movement of our Headquarters, but with news of continued advance. In the evening we heard with great pleasure that a cavalry patrol had already entered Udine. Sitting in the Corps Headquarters, we were roused by the sudden entry of the General, who brought the epoch-making news that the Armistice had been signed. It was too much to swallow in one gulp.

As an early start was necessary the next day, we decided to sleep on the news, and wait until the morning to see what conditions had been imposed on the enemy.

In order to reach the Armistice line by the right date, the troops had to march very hard, and every two days we moved forward with the Corps Headquarters. Though I knew that my work was over, and that an order for my return to G.H.Q. might arrive at any moment, I continued to accompany the Corps Headquarters as they marched

eastwards. On the 7th we reached Udine, a pretty little town, only slightly damaged, where I spent two days before my orders to return arrived.

The day before I left, I went for a magnificent day's run to Trieste. We started, a party of three, at 9 o'clock, and travelled *via* Palmanova and Montfalcone. At Montfalcone the Granatieri Brigade were already in occupation, and we passed through the old front line of before the retreat of 1917. Every house was a ruin, and the whole ground intersected by trenches and shell-holes. In fact, the whole area was characteristic of any devastated area round the front line in any theatre of war where the line had remained stationary for some months. Time, however, had done its work, and that part of the ground which was not bare rock was covered with weeds and every kind of wild undergrowth. Along the road we met a stream of released Italian prisoners—the most pathetic sight I had seen. Half-clothed, underfed, and wild-eyed from star-

vation, they were picking the grass from the ditches and eating it as they plodded through the mud. They had for the most part travelled with practically no food the whole way from their prison camps, and they were in the most terrible state. The situation was a very difficult one to deal with, but the way the Italians coped with it gave one more proof of their inability to meet an emergency. These released prisoners arrived at Trieste by road or rail at the rate of 10,000 a day. In Trieste the Italian military commandant, General Petitti, whom I knew well, had food enough to feed rather less than half this number, and no means of sending them into the interior. In spite of the fact that Trieste was a port, he was unable to get enough ships to bring sufficient food, or to deport these released prisoners to other towns on the Italian coast. A certain number were kept at Trieste and embarked on steamers as these arrived with supplies. They sat waiting on the quay, caged like wild animals, and nibbling at any

morsel that they could lay hands on. Those that were not thus retained were given a mere pittance on which to exist, and were sent back in unorganised bands to find their way by road into the Italian lines. It was impossible to bring up food, or send them down by rail, as the railway bridges over the Piave, Livenza, and Tagliamento could not be repaired for three weeks at least, and all available motor transport was employed in carrying up rations from the southern side of the Piave to keep up with the troops marching on into Austria. The position was pitiable and extremely dangerous. The sight of these starving men straggling in thousands along the roads in an exhausted condition detracted tremendously from the joy one wished to feel at the termination of hostilities. I must admit that we loaded our revolvers and kept them very handy, so likely was it that some incident might occur. On my return to the Corps I warned the General of the approach of this horde, and suggested that

it was hardly good for the morale of the population which was in a short time to be annexed to Italy, to see the way they treated their own countrymen. Those that came through the British area were helped by surplus stores of British rations on their way through, and the sufferings of thousands were thus alleviated. Even then the Italians failed to take advantage of our being able to help. I heard of one authentic instance of a dump of rations which had been handed to the Italians for distribution, being left by the roadside under a British guard, while hundreds of released prisoners passed unfed, only because the Italians did not wish the British to distribute them, and failed to make timely arrangements to take them over and distribute them themselves.

We had a splendid view of the city, as we curled down the side of the hill into the Gulf of Trieste, and our visit was of a most interesting character. The town was full to overflowing, though not of its own population. Crowds of Italian soldiers,

Italian released prisoners, British military, naval, and Air Force prisoners, French, Jugo-Slavs, and even Austrians. The city is a very fine one, with large public buildings, squares, and gardens. The shops also spacious, but a curious sight. The goods exposed in the windows were scanty both in quantity and quality, and showed evident signs of fake and "Ersatz." We lunched at the huge "Savoia" (possibly lately renamed) Hotel. A good lunch, but we were doubtful as to what we were eating. The price was only 16 kronen. As a rule, however, prices were prohibitive. Red wine was 40 kronen a bottle, and old women were selling chestnuts in the streets at a halfpenny apiece. The crowd in the hotel, as everywhere, was cosmopolitan to a degree. The people who most conspicuously wore ribbons and rosettes of the Italian colours were invariably those who looked most typically Hun.

On the return journey we gave a lift to two escaped Italian officer prisoners who

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were on their ninth day's journey from their prison camp in Bohemia. They told us extraordinary stories how their prison guards had left them to find their own way home ; how 150,000 Italian prisoners had died of hunger in the various prison camps ; how the population at the end were quite friendly towards them and were relying, now that the war was over, on the Allies for supplies of food. During my visit I had found out from the senior British officer released prisoner, the numbers of our countrymen that had arrived and were expected in Trieste, and promised to report this as soon as possible to G.H.Q. Arrangements were afterwards made to send for them in a destroyer from Venice.

The next day I bade farewell to my Italian friends and recrossed the Piave. On the 11th we heard that the Armistice had been signed with Germany, and that the war really was over. We could hardly realise the truth of it. It seemed impossible that, after four and a half years, that the

struggle was over : the fact that there was a war had become so ingrained into our minds, it had become so much a part of us, that it took us a very long time to become accustomed to the change. The thought struck me that the best way to become accustomed to it was to take a holiday. I applied immediately for leave to Rome, and left the same night.

After a fortnight's stay in Rome I returned to G.H.Q., to learn that I was to be charged with one more interesting mission. I was detailed to conduct an Austrian general and his chief staff officer back to his own country.

This general officer had commanded one of the Austrian divisions which had been captured by the British in its entirety, on the Asiago Plateau, just before the Armistice on 4th November. He had been wounded in very curious circumstances. In order not to have to feed too many of their own soldiers, the Austrian high command had given orders that the Armistice was to take

effect from six in the morning, whereas their delegates had agreed that it should, in fact, take effect from three in the afternoon. This general, early on the morning of the 4th, roused by rifle and machine-gun fire, observed that the British were approaching, and that fighting was still proceeding. Thinking that the Armistice was already in force, he resolved to walk out to the British lines and ask why they were continuing hostilities. While on his way he was slightly wounded, and when he reached the British he was, of course, promptly taken prisoner. He protested for himself and his men, and the situation was explained to him. It took him a very long time, however, to become convinced of the truth, and he naturally refused to believe that his own high command had issued false orders.

While he was recovering from his wounds he wrote to the British authorities asking to be released, and we were able, as a special act of courtesy, to obtain from the Italian

Comando Supremo permission to return him and his chief staff officer to the interior of his own country. For this purpose they ordered that he should be escorted by a British officer.

On the 1st December we set off. I had asked a friend to accompany me, who afterwards proved most useful, owing to his knowledge of German. We started provided with every possible accessory for ourselves and the cars. Behind us in a second car travelled the Austrian General, his staff officer and servant. The journey itself was uneventful, though we passed through wonderful country. Both the Austrian officers were charming—the General a small, bulldog type of man, sometimes amusingly dignified, the Colonel tall and well-built. They insisted at Bautzen, where we stopped at the end of the first stage of the journey, on inviting us to, and providing us with, a really excellent dinner at the chief hotel. We were surprised at there being such good food to be had. The General

said that for the moment at any rate Bautzen was an Austrian town, in spite of the fact that it was in Italian occupation, and that he was honoured in entertaining two British officers on his return to his own country. During conversation at dinner he spoke on all sort of subjects, in French and English, but made it clear that he was not enamoured of the Huns. He was himself actually a Pole, and told me that, if he found that the revolution in Austria had caused all military authority to lapse, he would go straight to Lemberg to join the Polish Army. His chief staff officer was also a very courteous gentleman. He told me that his wife was in Innsbruck, though of course she did not expect him to arrive on the next day. In fact, she did not know that he had been taken prisoner. After two days' journey we arrived in Innsbruck, where we set our two prisoners at liberty. The next day the Colonel called to see me. He told me that the General had left for Lemberg, and that he himself had found his wife, who was

delighted to have him home. He said that all discipline had lapsed in the army, and that he had been forced to take off his badges of rank. I was very sorry for him when he said to me : " This is the way my country treats me. I have been a soldier all my life, and fifty months in the front line during this war, and all the reward I have is the privilege of withdrawing my badges."

On the 4th December, in most beautiful weather, we commenced our southward journey over the Brenner Pass and down into the plains to Verona. We arrived before dark on the evening of the 5th, without a single involuntary stop and without a single puncture on either car throughout the whole trip.

After remaining at G.H.Q. for another three weeks, I left for England on the 21st. I arrived home on Christmas Eve, to enjoy Christmas at home, the first for five years, and the most appreciated of any during my life.

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Looking back on the year's experiences, I feel I must conclude with a few remarks on the general impression I brought away with me. It had been a wonderful year for Italy. Within almost exactly twelve months she had passed from a condition of affairs which was giving the Allies cause for the gravest anxiety to that of a victorious nation. Apart from all other considerations, this fact is conclusive. In an incredibly short time she had rebuilt her morale, re-established her resources, and shown herself to be a united nation bound to the cause. I have attempted to show what tremendous difficulties she had to fight against. An Italian officer once said to me: "Italy's greatest enemies are not in Austria: they are in Italy itself." Few Englishmen realise to what an extent the German and Austrian had forced their way into the very life of the nation. Italy, though rich in men of technical ability, with the will and the power to develop productive industries, is absolutely devoid of raw material. Her

industries are dependent on its being imported from abroad. This fact naturally increased the cost of production of the manufactured article, and put her at a disadvantage both in home and foreign markets with her Austrian and German neighbours.

These latter knew full well how to derive benefit from this state of affairs. By the sale of raw material, by financial aid in the construction of industrial plant, and by a generous system of credit, the Austrian and German had silently drawn into their clutches the preponderating control of Italy's economic efforts. By skilful economic diplomacy and astute propaganda they had won a most favoured place in the eyes of the small producer, the middleman, and the consumer. To these three classes, friendly relations with the central empires meant everything, and war meant almost certain ruin. Nothing touches a man so closely as that which touches his pocket. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that this con-

dition of affairs made it difficult for the controlling powers in Italy to maintain a war which affected them in this way, for what seemed an interminable time.

In the case of some classes of agriculturists the position led to similar results. I believe it to be a fact that Italy exported before the war no less than three million eggs per week. Her export trade in fruit was enormous, and in fact was the sole source of livelihood in certain districts in Italy. All these stocks were left to rot on the trees during the war, and this branch of trade was practically non-existent.

Perhaps an even more important factor which rendered Italy's position so peculiar was the enormous power of the Papal influence. The effect of this poison entering into the very life-blood of the nation was largely a contributory cause of the disaster of Caporetto. The priests in Italy had an almost uncanny influence on the minds of the peasants, on the women and children who were left behind. By preach-

ing and teaching anti-war, though not necessarily pro-Hun, doctrines, they did much to spread a spirit of discontent and impatience amongst the rural classes. Their doctrines were naturally very attractive and convincing, and spread, or were inclined to spread, to the Army. Who can prevent or even blame some wretched wife or mother from speaking her mind to her dear ones when they return for a brief respite from the discomforts and horrors of war? Who also can prevent the soldier from repeating these sentiments to his comrades on his return?

The rulers of Italy had no light task. It is as well to realise this when one feels inclined to criticise the Italians for apparent inaction and lack of confidence during the late summer and autumn of 1918. They may have lacked confidence, and in thinking as they did may have been wrong. But they could not risk failure, and they would not risk the possibility of it. They preferred to collect their resources and make

success a certainty, rather than risk a possible defeat. They may have been wrong, and they may even have been guilty. Criticise them possibly, but remember and realise the difficulties that they had to fight, and the internal condition of the country.

From a military point of view one must admit that the Italians were lucky. They won a military victory, but by the skin of their teeth. Austria had broken up politically before the offensive was launched, but the Austrian Army stood firm. If discipline had not been so high, if the system of censorship had not been so rigorous, the Austrian Army would probably have melted away before the Italians had launched their attack. The Austrian, however, was a stubborn fighter, and offered a determined resistance to all the Allied attacks until it became impossible for him to remain on his positions. The proof of this is seen in the great number of prisoners and guns captured by the Italians and their Allies. They had stopped and fought too long, and

they were caught in a trap and forced to surrender.

The military success which rendered this wholesale retirement of the Austrian Army inevitable was undoubtedly brought about by the British troops and the Italians operating under the command of Lord Cavan. All Italian staff officers who saw the progress of events from the broad point of view realise this, and most of them admit it. But I do not think Italy realises it, and the military authorities did not take much pains to impress it on the mind of the people. British propaganda did not exist; the British dislike self-advertisement. But the Italian people were kept in ignorance of the extent to which they were indebted to the British for their final success, and this fact did a great deal of harm at a later date. The Italian authorities had every reason for raising the morale of the nation and making the most of the great victory of their Army. But it would seem that they would not have detracted anything

from the honour and glory of their own arms by giving the British soldier what was his due.

The Italian people as a whole, through no fault of their own, did not show much gratitude for the services of the British Army in Italy. This does not matter ; but what did matter was the result, shown by the course of subsequent events.

After the conclusion of the Armistice, the Italians, rightly or wrongly, occupied Fiume, and very soon this event was followed by an Allied occupation. The British took up a fair and non-committal attitude towards Italian claims, endeavouring to calm them in their spasms of over-excitement, and stating that Italy's claims would have full attention and recognition at the deliberations of the Peace Conference. They naturally refused to support the Italian claim for Fiume to the same degree that the Italians urged it for themselves, and this non-committal policy resulted in the Italians thinking that we were opposed to them.

We were not antagonistic to them, but we told them to be patient. They thought not only that we were hostile to their claims, but that we had deserted the cause, which we had formerly supported. The result was that a certain amount of ill-feeling was shown in some quarters after the Armistice.

In these circumstances, if the Italians had been frankly told what the British had done for them, and how sincere and well-meaning the British attitude was, it would have done much to allay the suspicions or ill-feeling that were being roused in the present case, and at the same time it would not have deteriorated, in the minds of the Italian people, the value of the work of their own Army.

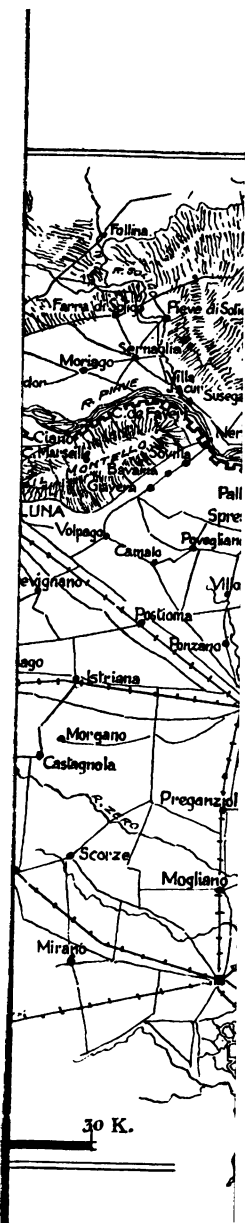
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As for myself, I cannot but speak with feelings of pleasure and gratitude of the way that I was treated during my year among the Italians. They were untiring in their efforts to help and oblige: they

always gave me every facility to enable me to carry out my work. Their generosity was at all times spontaneous.

Amongst the officers I made some life-long friends, and wherever I went I was welcomed cordially, and everything was done to make me comfortable and at home. In their relations with the British troops they were most generous and accommodating ; neither in the days when General Plumer was in command nor when Lord Cavan succeeded him did I ever hear of the Italians refusing the British any request that was put to them. They made no difficulties in coming into line with the British commander's wishes ; and if there were difficulties, they were swiftly overcome.

I found them a charming people living in a most wonderful country. Their musical language, their great artistic sense, their tremendous sense of humour, their youth, and their resiliency could not fail to fascinate and attract. Their history as a united people is only beginning.



INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

M. = *Mountain.*
Col = *Hill.*
Ten. = *Tenente (lieut.).*
Ten.-Colon. = *Tenente-Colonello.*

Colon. = *Colonello.*
Commdt. = *Commandant.*
Cap. = *Capitano.*
Magg. = *Maggiore.*

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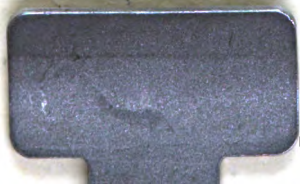
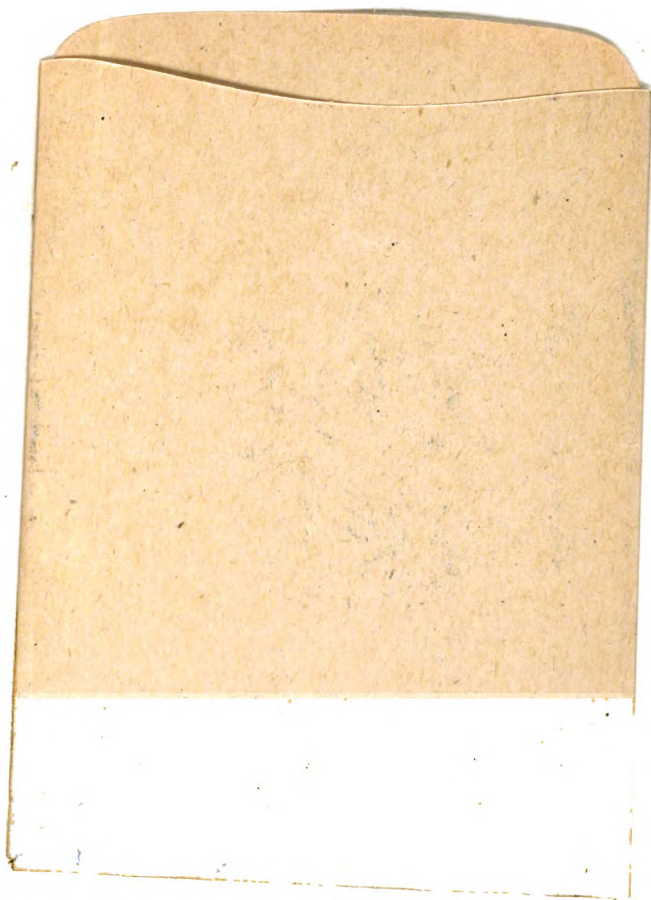
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